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ROMAN FRONTIERS AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EAST¹

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In the late 560s a Turkish embassy arrived in Constantinople at the court of Justin II. The Turks had just broken off relations with the Persians and were eager to enter into an alliance with the Romans. The emperor, having read through the letter from the Turkish ruler Sizabul brought by the embassy, proceeded to ask questions of the legation. He asked to know more about the Hephthalites, the powerful nation which the Turks claimed to have just conquered, and about the Avars, who had recently revolted from Turkish overlordship. Upon receiving their replies, Justin concluded an alliance with the Turks. It was a fateful development, for, buoyed up by this alliance, Justin soon reopened hostilities with Persia, ushering in a conflict which would last twenty years.²

This episode is worthy of attention for two reasons. First, Justin's questioning of the ambassadors testifies to an active interest in the political geography of eastern Iran and the central Asian steppes: he enquires about the structure of the Turkish kingdom and about the nature of the Hephthalite kingdom.³ Second, the ramifications of the alliance are quite clear to Justin: he believed that it offered him the chance to crush the Persians decisively since they would come under attack on two fronts simultaneously.⁴ These points no doubt do not appear controversial. However, in recent years there has been much

¹ This paper is an expanded version of one given at the conference in Sydney in May 2003. It was completed in August 2004, but has been updated as far as possible up to March 2006. I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding my participation at the conference and to the hosts of the conference at Macquarie University. The comments of the participants, especially of Robin Tracey, helped improve the paper, as did those of Evangelos Chrysos, Doug Lee, Michael Kulikowski, Fergus Millar and Adrian Goldsworthy.

² Men. Prot. frg.10.1 on the negotiations.

³ Men. Prot. frg.10.1. The question about the Hephthalites may in fact have been a test for the ambassadors: since the time of Procopius, the Romans knew that the Hephthalites, unlike other peoples whom they called Huns, were not nomadic (*Wars* I.3.3).

⁴ Men. Prot. frg.13.5.

debate about Roman strategy - particularly about the existence or not of what might be termed a 'grand strategy' - and about Roman ability to formulate such a strategy in the first place. If they had no access to reliable maps, it is argued, then their geographical ignorance will almost certainly have precluded the possibility of thinking strategically. Invariably, these discussions start with the reign of Augustus; some conclude in the second century, while a few go as far as the fourth. The consensus arrived at so far has tended towards the negative: the Romans are held to have been bereft of any maps whatsoever, lacking the ability to perceive space in the way required by two-dimensional maps. On a wider level, they were driven more by an all-consuming ideology of continuous conquest than by any desire (for instance) to maintain their hold over the territories they had acquired. It follows from such a view that the concept of a 'Roman strategy' is inappropriate, still less any notion of a grand strategy.⁵

The aim of this further contribution to the debate is to approach the problem from the opposite direction. It will be demonstrated that in the late empire the Romans did, for the most part, have a strategy and that - contrary to the views of many scholars - the empire did have clear frontiers, at least in some regions. This can be shown without establishing that they used maps comparable to those employed today, but it will be useful then to offer a brief overview of what light research on Roman maps sheds on the issue. We shall conclude the discussion by moving back to the high empire from late antiquity, in order to see whether the debate can be advanced by applying perspectives from the later period.

It is necessary before going further to consider briefly the matter of terminology. What do we mean by a 'frontier'? What notion did the Romans have of a frontier and how should terms like *limes* and *fines* be translated? Much research has been devoted to the vocabulary used to refer to frontiers, mostly on the Latin rather than the Greek terms, and it is not our intention to go over this ground again; we shall in any case be

⁵ This outline may seem to be a caricature, but see Whittaker 1994, 1996 (although at the end of the latter article Whittaker is prepared to accept the existence of some sort of strategic planning), Isaac 1992, ch.9, cf. idem 1995, 126-9 (concerning the period of Heraclius).

more concerned with Greek terms in our initial discussion.⁶ We may nevertheless note that while *fines* appears to be a rather loose term,⁷ *limes* on the other hand is more concrete: it is used, in the late antique period at any rate, to designate a frontier district.⁸ Benjamin Isaac, in an important study of the term, strenuously argued that it should be dissociated from the notion of a fortified frontier, a concept unfamiliar to the Romans. Such a view has little to recommend it. As Constantin Zuckerman has shown, not only did the *limes* constitute a network of forts and fortresses guarding the empire, but it was also perceived as such by contemporaries: several sources evoke the idea of an empire defended from the surrounding barbarians by a system of fortifications.⁹ Of more importance for our purposes is whether the notion of an established linear frontier existed for the Romans. Below we shall attempt to prove the existence of such fixed frontiers in late antiquity; for the moment, we may note that already in Tacitus there is a reference to such a boundary, while the same concept is to be found later in Zosimus and Procopius.¹⁰ It will not do therefore to regard linear frontiers as a

⁶ See Troussel 1993 on the Latin terms; Casevitz 1993, 1995 examines Greek terms (but from the Homeric period for the most part). Arrignon and Duneau 1981, 19-24, offer an analysis of the terms used by Procopius.

⁷ So Troussel 1993, 26-7.

⁸ So Isaac 1988; cf. Mayerson 1986, 1989, Whittaker 1994, 136-9, 145, 200-2, favouring the view of a *limes* as a 'frontier district' (not necessarily very close to the frontier); also Carrié 1995, 34-41. Carrié and Rousselle 1999, 619-20, suggest that it would be best to avoid the term altogether.

⁹ Isaac insisted that in late antiquity the *limes* 'denoted an administrative concept, again unconnected with the military structures which may have existed in the area', cf. Carrié 1995, 34-5, idem and Rousselle 1999, 616-19. See, however, the cogent points made by Troussel 1993, 26 n.6, Wheeler 1993, 27-8, Chauvot 1998, 210-11, 227, Zuckerman 1998, Gichon 2002, 189-90. To the examples cited by Zuckerman of defended frontiers add Libanius, *Or.* 20.17 (on Diocletian), noted by Lewin 2002, 98.

¹⁰ Tac. *Agr.* 41.2, cited by Isaac 1988, 128 (the term *limes* being used for the 'land-boundary' of the empire, as opposed to the *ripa*, cf. Troussel 1993, 26 n.6 on the importance of this passage); Zos. II.34.1-2 on the defence of the *eskhatia* of the empire with Proc. *Anecd.* 24.12-13 (both cited by Isaac 1988, 135-6). Whittaker 1994, 68, opposes the idea of a boundary in the East, cf. Visy 2002, 74 (although his argument is sometimes hard to follow).

product of the nation states of the nineteenth century. This seems to be the contention of Whittaker, although his arguments on this point are somewhat inconsistent. At one moment he states that '[t]he administrative line of a frontier therefore did not inhibit the Romans from advancing beyond', with which we are in complete agreement. He also rightly stresses the permeability of Roman frontiers.¹¹ At other moments, however, as we shall see below, he seems to deny the existence of any frontiers at all. The reason for this inconsistency is that he is seeking for traces of a defensible military frontier; and when he finds what some scholars have perceived to be fortified frontiers, he is at pains to show how they cannot have been such. Rivers and lines of forts are indeed unsatisfactory barriers, as he underlines. They do, however, make very convenient points of reference, and are often used as such.¹² An obvious case is the admittance of the Tervingi to imperial soil in 376: they asked to cross the Danube into Roman territory, and the emperor Valens agreed. In the eyes of both Tervingi and Romans, the crossing of the Danube marked the passage of an outside people into the empire.¹³ Further examples will be considered below. Where clear natural frontiers were not in evidence, furthermore, the Romans were prepared to install their own markers, in the form of palisades and walls, as, for

¹¹ Quotation from Whittaker 1994, 95. Whittaker 1994, 7-8, seems to imply that fixed frontiers would be an anachronism for the Romans. *Ibid.* 222-42 on the permeability of frontiers; cf. e.g. Leveau 1995, 61-3 and below nn.27, 54. Whittaker's influence is palpable in Janniard 2001, 352-3, a critical evaluation of Nicasie 1998, although it is absent from Carrié and Janniard 2000, 331-41, a review of Haldon 1999 (who, 60-1, accepts the notion of a linear frontier).

¹² Whittaker 1994, 66, asserts that '[a]s long as an imperial state has neighbors, the neighbors are necessarily inferior and the state has no frontiers in our sense.' Cf. *ibid.* 7-8 and Troussel 1993, 32-3. Whittaker 1994, 61, on the ineffectiveness of rivers. *Contra*, Wheeler 1994, 24-5, on the frequent use of river frontiers with Traina 2004, 210-11, on the relevance of natural (especially river) frontiers in the Armenian context and below n.154. Nicasie 1998, 122-3, is rightly critical of Whittaker's dismissal of the importance of rivers and cites numerous ancient sources on their usefulness (cf. Bertrand 1997, 118-19, on Caesar referring to them as boundaries in Gaul). Whittaker 2004, 6-7, has now acknowledged the use of rivers as defensible frontiers.

¹³ See Ammianus XXXI.4 with Heather 1991, ch.4, Lenski 2002, 320-5, and below p.125.

instance, in the case of the Agri Decumates in the late first century A.D. As the studies of Joëlle Napoli have demonstrated, these ‘ouvrages linéaires’ were designed to mark a boundary, not to protect it.¹⁴ We may also note that Whittaker fails to pay sufficient attention to the legal aspect of Roman frontiers: it would be surprising if the Romans, generally so interested in demarcating and enclosing space, had not addressed the matter of defining where Roman law applied and where it did not. The rights of a citizen returning to Roman soil were an issue discussed by the jurists. It was necessary therefore to determine at what point one reached Roman soil.¹⁵ All in all, Whittaker’s discussion of frontiers is problematic: at some moments he seems to accept the notion of this sort of administrative frontier, yet at others his attacks on the existence of any kind of frontier or strategy sweep these considerations aside.¹⁶

¹⁴ Napoli 1989, 826-33, cf. eadem 1993, 70 and Potter 1992, 270-3. See further n.16 below. Nicasie 1998, 141, argues that these installations did serve a defensive purpose, however minimal. Napoli’s (and Potter’s) arguments are in direct contrast to the insistence of Whittaker that no boundaries to the empire have ever been discovered, quoted below p.109. Cf. also Traina 2004, 212 on the fortified line noted by Crow 1986, 87, which might correspond to the division of Armenia attributed to Probus (on which see n.68 below).

¹⁵ Carrié 1995, 49-51, highlighting also customs dues (on which see Potter 1992, 271-2), but omitting the question of *postliminium*, on which see Whittaker 1994, 68. *Postliminium* is a tricky issue because, as Trouset 1993, 28, notes, it was deemed to apply as soon as a citizen entered the territory of an allied people or king, before the *de facto* border of the empire was crossed; see also Potter 1996, 57. Cf. Wheeler 2002, 290-1, for a comparable distinction between a *de facto* and a *de iure* frontier. Roman interest in demarcating territory: Whittaker 1994, 10-11, 18-20, Trouset 1993, 31-2, Wheeler 1993, 228.

¹⁶ Whittaker’s quotation from Appian (pr.4) at 71, concerning the Romans ruling some Celts beyond the Rhine, far from disproving the notion of a Rhine frontier, shows rather how it did function as a demarcation line (see further nn.69, 148 below on the Danube). The straight line on the Upper German frontier which he points out cannot have functioned ‘as a tactical or strategic frontier’ (72) is precisely the sort of line which demarcates many international boundaries in the world today (e.g. between the U.S.A. and Canada). See Carrié 1995, 51, on the need to distinguish a ‘frontière militaire’ and a ‘frontière juridico-politique’, Thébert 1995, 234-5 (on the frontier in Germany).

We began by recounting an episode from the late 560s reported by Menander Protector. Less than a decade before the Turkish mission to Constantinople, a definitive fifty-year peace had been concluded between the Romans and the Persians. It is Menander once again who provides the details of the treaty which brought an end to over twenty years of intermittent war. The provisions of the treaty show clearly that a precise demarcated frontier line between the two powers was envisaged: article eight, for instance, provides that neither power should fortify a place along the frontier (τι τῶν ἐν τοῖς ὁροθεσίοις χωρίων). Article four deals with the reception of ambassadors on Roman or Persian territory, and in this instance we may call upon another source to shed light on the protocol.¹⁷ The ninth-century *De Cerimoniis* offers a detailed account, probably taken from the work of the sixth-century diplomat who negotiated the treaty of 562, Peter the Patrician, of what happened when a Persian ambassador reached the Roman frontier. Again, it emerges very clearly from the description that the Roman dignitaries are to go and meet the Persian ambassador at the frontier - in this case, on the road leading from Nisibis to Dara.¹⁸ Where, then, was this boundary? The sixth-century historian Procopius allows us to be more precise:

This (city, Dara) is 98 stades away from Nisibis and about 28 from the place (χώρα) which divides the territories (τὰ) of the Romans and Persians. (Proc. *Wars* I.10.14, tr. Dewing.)

Whittaker 1996, 33, acknowledges that there were borders of the empire, replying to Wheeler 1993, 29-30. Already in Whittaker 1994, 18-20, 176, he accepts the possibility of a 'visible political boundary'. Nevertheless, other pronouncements of his (as noted above and quoted below, p.109) tend to deny this; cf. idem 1994, 140-1, insisting on the lack of a frontier in the east.

¹⁷ Men. Prot. frg.6.1, tr. in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 131-3, citation from line 356.

¹⁸ *De Cer.* 89, translated in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 124-8. The importance of this passage for our present purposes is highlighted by Kaegi 1996, 84-5, an unjustly neglected article. Cf. Winter 1994, 605-6, drawing attention to Men. Prot. frg.20.1.40-2, a dispute in 576 about where negotiations should take place: the Persians refused to meet their Roman interlocutors at Dara on the grounds that territorial boundaries here had not been established (since the Persian capture of Dara).

It follows that, at least along the road between Nisibis and Dara, there was a clearly designated place where one passed from Persian territory to Roman. This point is of fundamental importance, for some scholars clearly imply that the Romans - at least in an earlier period, but equally, it seems, in the late empire - could not conceive of such a thing. It is worth quoting the assertions of Whittaker in full:

But there was also an unwillingness to accept that Rome had any boundaries. That feeling derived perfectly rationally from certain ideological principles. It is an extraordinary fact that no Roman geographic description or map tells us where the boundaries of the empire actually lay or whether there were ever any marker stones.¹⁹

Further cases from the very end of the sixth century and the early seventh century may be brought to bear. When Khusro II was restored to the Persian throne in 591 with Roman backing, he ceded several territories to his allies, as he had promised:

Then king Khusro gave gifts to them all according to each one's status and dismissed them from him. He himself set out from Atropatene and reached Asorestan, his own royal residence. He was confirmed on the throne of the kingdom, and he carried out his promise of gifts for the emperor. He transferred to them all Aruastan as far as Nisibis; and the land of Armenia which was under his authority, the Tanuter tun as far as the river Hurazdan, the province of Koteik' as far as the town of Garni, and up to the shore of the lake of Bzunik' and up to Arestawan, and the province of Gogovit as far as Hats'iwn and Maku. The region of the Vaspurakan gund was subject to the Persian king. Out of the Armenian nobles, many were in the Greek sector, and a few in the Persian. But the king summoned Mushet to the palace, and he saw his country no more. (*Ps.-Sebeos* 84.20-32, tr. T. Greenwood in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 174.)

The Romans thus made significant gains of territory in what had hitherto been Persarmenia, as well as restoring the frontier in Mesopotamia. The

¹⁹ Whittaker 1994, 68, cf. Mattern 1999, 115. Isaac 1992, 373, 392, 397-8, argues that the Romans never accepted the idea of defensive frontiers in the East. On the matter of marker stones, see n.73 below. Note also Arrian, *Periplus*, 17.2 (120.7-8), where he explicitly states (concerning Dioscurias) τελευτῶ 'Ρωμαίοις ἡ ἐπικράτεια ('the Roman empire ends') a reference I owe to Fergus Millar.

precise contours of the new frontier need not detain us here;²⁰ what stands out, however, is the precision with which territory is apportioned. Specific provinces are named and river boundaries are frequently mentioned. The two powers could be in no doubt as to what belonged to whom. This could be exploited by the Armenians to their own advantage: Pseudo-Sebeos recounts how in 601 Atat Khorkhoruni, an Armenian noble based in Roman Armenia, withdrew into Persian territory (Nakhchawan) rather than leave for Constantinople.²¹ One final case from this eventful period is relevant. Once Heraclius had successfully brought about the downfall of Khusro II by his bold invasion of the heartlands of his kingdom, he had then to negotiate peace terms with the leading general of Khusro, Shahrvaraz. The two leaders met at Arabissus in July 629. There, according to the Syriac *Chronicle of 724*, they agreed that the river Euphrates should constitute the boundary between the two kingdoms; Pseudo-Sebeos for his part reports more vaguely that the two leaders negotiated as to where to establish the border between their two states.²² Although it is likely that the *Chronicle* is mistaken in fixing the boundary at the Euphrates, the author (writing only a decade or so after the event) clearly felt that there was nothing implausible in such an agreement being concluded.²³

Before moving back to the fourth and fifth centuries, we must pause to consider more evidence of the situation in the sixth. A Syriac source, the *Life of John of Tella* by Elias, recounts the tribulations of an anti-Chalcedonian bishop during the reign of Justinian. In the aftermath of the Eternal Peace of 532, a joint force of Roman and Persian soldiers hunted the bishop down and captured him in the Jebel Sinjar (in Persian territory). He was then taken to Nisibis, the seat of the *marzban*, the local Persian commander, where he was interrogated. His answers testify clearly to the awareness among the local population of a firm distinction between Roman and Persian territory:

²⁰ See the references and brief discussion in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 294-5 n.55.

²¹ Ps.-Sebeos, 104-5, tr. Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999, 55-6, cf. Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 178.

²² *Chr.* 724, 147.23-4, cf. 139.17-18 with Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 226. Ps.-Sebeos 130, tr. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, 88.

²³ See Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 226-7, on the question of where the frontiers were established in 629; Howard-Johnston 1999, 28, is prepared to accept the *Chronicle's* version. See also Kaegi 1996, 89-90.

And he (the *marzban*) spoke with him (John) through an interpreter, who said to him in Greek: 'How did you dare, a man such as you, to cross over into our territory without our (permission)? Do you not know that this is another state?' The blessed man replied, speaking to him through the interpreter in Greek, 'It is not the first time that I have crossed over into this land. This is the third time that I have crossed over, in order that I might pray among these saints who have lived for many years on the mountain (Jebel Sinjar) from which you took me away as an evil-doer. For who am I that your greatness knows of me and (knows that) I had crossed over then? For I am a poor man, just as you see me. Today, while there is complete peace between these two kingdoms, I did not know one state from another. For the two kings are brothers in love; and, if I am here, I think I am among Romans, and, if I am among Romans, I am here on account of (that) peace.' (Elias, *Vit. Joh. Tel.* 71-2, tr. M. Greatrex in Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 98.)

Elias' account highlights several issues. First, John was clearly aware not only of the existence of the frontier, but also of when he crossed it, i.e. where it was situated. In the area concerned, Osrhoene and Beth Arabaye, the frontier line followed the river Khabur; that John should have been fully conscious of how often he had crossed the frontier is hardly surprising therefore.²⁴ Second, this frontier was highly permeable: no one had sought to bar John's route in either direction. No doubt this was due in part to the low population density in this region, but in fact in peace time, as John so well underlines, the frontiers were simply not an issue.²⁵ It is worth underlining this point, for it is not our purpose to argue that the frontiers, however clear they may have been, represented some sort of hermetic barrier to the passage of people, goods or information. There is plenty of evidence to show that there was much traffic across the frontiers, notably among Christian pilgrims from Persian territory visiting the holy sites in Palestine; Jews likewise crossed the frontier to visit their coreligionists.²⁶ Traders naturally also

²⁴ Cf. Greatrex 1998, 19 for the frontier in this region (with the map on 20).

²⁵ Dillemann 1962, 66-71 on the terrain here.

²⁶ See Lee 1993, 49-66, a very valuable treatment of the nature of the eastern frontier. As he observes, 55, the frontier could conversely be closed up in wartime; cf. Carrié 1995, 50-1. Note also Lieu 1996, 134-5, a review of Lee 1993, and Millar 1993, 483-4. Fowden 1993, 17-19 (cf. Lee 1993, 49-51, Key Fowden 1999, 3, 63) emphasises the natural unity of this region, despite the presence of the frontier in this period. His insistence that control of Syria-Mesopotamia cannot be shared

frequently moved from one empire to the other, although both powers, fearing that they might act as spies, attempted to limit their movements.²⁷

Procopius' works provide further important information on the workings of the eastern frontier, and on imperial strategy generally, during the reign of Justinian. In surveying the eastern provinces and detailing the emperor's building activities in the *De Aedificiis*, he describes an enclave of Roman territory at Rhabdion, inside the Persian kingdom (II.4.1-7).²⁸ It is true that the border he describes in Armenia is much more fluid, especially in Chorazane, but here the Emperor Justinian marked off Roman territory and planted fortresses to defend it.²⁹ The same emperor reorganised the whole frontier command structure, altering the provincial boundaries of Armenia and appointing a *magister militum* for the Armenian and Caucasian regions.³⁰ Indeed, it is possible to see in Justinian an emperor keenly aware of the extent of the Roman empire and of what territories had once belonged to it. It was his mission to recover as many of these as possible, he believed; for it was the negligence of his predecessors that had led to their annexation by other peoples.³¹ Thus Belisarius, no doubt acting upon instructions, offered to hand over to the Goths the province of Britain, 'which earlier had been subject to the Romans', should they evacuate Italy (Proc. *Wars* VI.6.28).³² Agathias, Procopius' continuator, highlights the pride

between rival powers is undermined by the fact that Rome and Persia were able to maintain almost entirely peaceful relations throughout the fifth century.

²⁷ See Lee 1993, 61-5 on traders, cf. Millar 1993, 483-4. See also Whittaker 2004, 205. Regulations: see (in general) Thompson 1982, 10-15, Potter 1992, 271, and on the east, Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 33-4 and Winter and Dignas 2001, 205-19.

²⁸ See Greatrex 1998, 21, on this region.

²⁹ Proc. *Aed.* III.3.9-11, cf. Potter 1996, 57, noting that Proc.'s description shows that people were nevertheless aware that there was a border, even if they paid it little heed. Cf. the case of John of Tella noted above.

³⁰ Cf. Greatrex 1998, 153-4 and forthcoming.

³¹ *NovJ* 30.11.2 (March 536), cf. Honoré 1983, 18-19, Haldon 1999, 39 (who regards the reconquest of the West as the 'grand strategy' of Justinian).

³² Cf. *Wars* VII.14.32, Justinian's proposal to the Antae to establish themselves in Turrus, a city founded by Trajan to the north but long since abandoned. In this case too, the emperor claimed that it had originally belonged to the Romans. See Chrysos 1987, 32-3, 36 and Bogdan Catanciu 2002, 727.

with which Justinian greeted the subjugation of the Tzani, a highland people of the Caucasus who had eluded Roman rule up until then: he had hence brought into subjection a new people (rather than pacifying a people or region already under Roman control).³³ Lastly, there is the case of North Africa. Almost as soon as Belisarius had overthrown the Vandal kingdom in 532, the emperor moved to take control of the former Roman provinces. It is worth citing an extract of the law from the *Codex Justinianus* in full;

... usque ad illos fines prouincias africanas extendere ubi ante invasionem Vandalorum et Maurorum respublica romana fines habuerat et ubi custodes antiqui seruabant, sicut ex clusuris et burgis ostenditur. (C.J. I.27.4)

... to extend the African provinces to those boundaries where the Roman state had (them) before the invasion of the Vandals and Moors and where the former guards kept watch, as is evident from the walls and towers.

As we shall see later in this paper, Vergil may have had Jupiter declare to Aeneas that he had granted to the Romans an empire without limits, but Justinian at least was rather more pragmatic. He knew that Roman rule had not extended indefinitely southwards in north Africa and sought merely to regain what had once belonged to his predecessors.³⁴ This attitude has been characterised as 'defensive imperialism', i.e. an insistence on maintaining the integrity of the empire and never accepting the loss of any part of it. The case of the Tzani noted above, however, shows that the Romans never renounced the right to undertake new conquests, even if the subjugation of this remote hill-people did not represent a significant addition to the empire. A few late emperors, most

³³ Agath. *Hist.* V.2.4, cf. *NovJ* 1, *proem.* with Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 97-8, for a translation.

³⁴ The extracts cited are discussed by Napoli and Rebuffat 1993, who note the distinction drawn between the frontier itself and the installations which defend it, *clausurae* and *burgi*; *ibid.* for a discussion of their term *clausurae* with Whittaker 1994, 79-80. Arce 2001, 10, rightly also draws attention to the passage. See also now Troussset 2002, esp.144; Whittaker 1994, 199, oddly interprets the law as indicating that Justinian was not certain where the boundary lay.

notably Justin II (565-578), may have adopted a more aggressive attitude; invariably, it proved disastrous.³⁵

We have moved, inevitably, from frontiers to the issue of Roman strategy. Justinian himself clearly had a strategy for the empire, a strategy which we have termed defensive imperialism.³⁶ Although we shall deal with fourth century evidence below, it is appropriate to quote a passage from a treatise of Themistius in this context:

The king must have knowledge of news of the neighbouring kingdoms and he must not neglect them in any way whatsoever. He must also support his frontiers with men and he must face every nation with which he is in competition, providing a number of soldiers sufficient for military necessities. The nations differ in their courage and cowardice. If he (the king) invades the country of one of these nations, he must make preparations as is necessary in such cases, and attack them before they reach the middle of his country. He must also ensure that his enemies do not get wind of his attack and his planning must be concealed. (Themistius, *Epistula de re publica gerenda*, ed. I. Shahîd in *Themistii Orationes*, vol.3, p.112, tr. A. al-Jadir.)

Here we see a clear awareness of the limits of imperial power and of the need to be well informed about one's neighbours in order to maintain one's position. Attacks on foreign peoples are envisaged, but as a pre-emptive measure. Themistius is, in effect, offering a statement

³⁵ Cf. Pohl 2001, 251-2, noting the failures of Justin II and Maurice (although the latter had more success for the most part). *Ibid.* for the concept of 'defensive imperialism', a term applied to Byzantine foreign policy by Obolensky 1952, 52, cf. Chrysos 1992, 28-9. See also Haldon 1999, 34-9, 43, for a similar view. This formulation has also been used as a way to explain the growth of the Roman empire in the Republican period, where it entailed actual expansion; see Rich 1993, 40-1 and Linderski 1984. One might alternatively describe the policy as 'aggressive defence' or perhaps 'preclusive defence' (a term used by Luttwak 1976, 51, for imperial strategy between A.D. 70 and 180).

Ahrweiler 1975, 17-24, sees two strands in Byzantine policy in this early period, the one (western) being more ambitious, the other (eastern), being more pragmatic.

³⁶ It would not be unreasonable to claim that this policy was the 'grand strategy' of the Roman empire in this period: for a full discussion of the use of this term and its senses see Wheeler 1993, 10, 21-4, 216-18. Nicasie 1998, 119, 172-7 takes just this view.

articulating the notion of defensive imperialism.³⁷ In the case of Justinian, the evidence furnished by Procopius in the *De Aedificiis*, detailing all the attention lavished by the emperor on protecting the frontiers, is unambiguous: the emperor meant to preserve the territorial integrity of the empire he had inherited (and conquered). Yet despite all his efforts, both the Danube and eastern frontiers were penetrated several times during his reign. There is general agreement among scholars that the empire became overstretched, largely because of the forces and funds required to secure the conquest of Italy; the situation remained precarious under his successors.³⁸ Under such circumstances, a policy of defensive imperialism would appear entirely rational, perhaps even ambitious. Nevertheless, some scholars, most notably Benjamin Isaac, have insisted that the Romans consistently maintained an aggressive posture in their relations with the Parthians and Persians, right up until the seventh century.³⁹ This leads Isaac to problematise the wars in the East in late antiquity thus: 'It is in fact obscure what the strategic aim of the Byzantine rulers was in fighting Persia.'⁴⁰ The problem is predicated on the idea that the Romans actually sought to come to blows with the Persians, an idea belied by the facts themselves: after Julian's invasion of Persia in 363, which, it can be argued, was merely a response to decades of Persian harassment of the eastern Roman provinces, only

³⁷ The treatise survives only in Arabic; I am grateful to Adil al-Jadir for providing the translation. Traina 1993, 286, offers a French translation and analysis; he also connects it with Justinian's approach. One might compare the very similar advice offered by the sixth-century *Peri Strategias* ch.5 (p.20-1), noted by Haldon 1999, 67. As he notes, in the fourth century there was much debate about how to deal with barbarians, cf. Chauvot 1998, esp.350-7 on Synesius and 292-4 on Themistius. See also below n.76.

³⁸ Jones 1964, 298-302, cf. Ostrogorsky 1969, 71, 78 and Obolensky 1952, 61.

³⁹ Isaac 1992, 31, 266-7, cf. idem 1993, 113 and 1995, 126-37 (on Heraclius' campaigns). Similar views in Whittaker 1996, 38. The term preferred by these scholars is 'ideology', in this case the ideology of conquest, which brooked no rival. Contra (e.g.) Haldon 1993, 466, stressing the defensive posture of the Roman army in the sixth century.

⁴⁰ Isaac 1992, 266. As Nicasie 1998, 180, puts it, 'to try to establish why Rome went to war or not seems a rather fruitless waste of time. During the period under discussion, from the last quarter of the third century until about 378, there was usually no choice.'

one war between the great powers was started by the Romans.⁴¹ This was the war of 572-591, and, as we have noted already, it was the initiative of Justin II, encouraged by his contacts with the Turks, which brought it about. Justin's hopes of a decisive victory were swiftly dashed and he soon went mad. Thus the one exception to the rule turns out to be the work of an unbalanced emperor. Every other war began with Persian attacks on Roman territory, to which the empire was forced to respond. The problem posed by Isaac thus crumbles away: the Romans were fighting the Persians quite simply in order to maintain the status quo, to defend their provinces (with the support, in many cases, of the inhabitants themselves).⁴²

It is time now to look back at the earlier period of late antiquity and to examine what traces of a delimited frontier can be found. A good place to start is the treaty concluded between the Emperor Diocletian and the Persian king Narses in 299. According to the fragment of the work of Peter the Patrician which preserves the terms of the treaty, the Romans gained control of several Armenian satrapies; it was agreed that the fortress of Zintha, 'which lies on the border of Media, should mark the edge of Armenia'; furthermore, 'the river Tigris should be the boundary between each state'.⁴³ This important passage raises several points.

⁴¹ We thus disagree fundamentally with the analysis of Isaac 1992, ch.1, in which he tries to pin all the blame for Romano-Parthian and Persian wars on the Romans, cf. Whittaker 1994, 213. See the criticisms of Wheeler 1993, 11, 33-6, 38 (citing Ammianus XXIII.5.18 on Julian's justification for his attack), Kennedy 1996, 76-8 and Wheeler 2002, 287.

⁴² See Greatrex 1998, 10-18, on the wars after 363; fuller details in Greatrex and Lieu 2002. The loyalty of the inhabitants of the eastern provinces, who bore the brunt of the campaigning by the two sides, is attested (e.g.) by the pleas to Jovian not to surrender Nisibis in 363 (see Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 10-13) and by the gallant defence offered by civilians at Amida in 502-3 (Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 63-7) and at Sergiopolis in 542 (Proc. *Wars* II.20.1-16). On the start of Justin II's war see Whitby 1988, 250-4 and Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 135-50; Pohl 2001, 251 accurately characterises Justin as having 'relied too much on [his] own triumphalist rhetoric', as embodied in the panegyric by Corippus, for instance.

⁴³ Petr. Patr. frg.13, tr. J.M. Lieu in Dodgeon and Lieu 1991, 133. For a recent detailed discussion of this treaty and its clauses see Winter and Dignas 2001, 144-55.

(1) Even at a time of great success, the Romans could conceive of limits to their empire. What is more, traces of a boundary in Upper Mesopotamia have been discovered: between the Jebel Sinjar mountains and the Khabur a wall was constructed towards the end of the third century. It appears to have marked the frontier in an area where no natural features (such as rivers or streams) existed to demarcate the line.⁴⁴

(2) The two powers both knew and agreed where the Armenian satrapies were situated.

(3) We are dealing with places and regions, not peoples (although the Armenian satrapies are often referred to as *ethnē* or *gentes*). In earlier times, the Romans certainly did view themselves as ruling peoples, rather than territories, but it appears that by this time the situation has changed. If, as Isaac contends, the notion of an empire controlling peoples indicates the open-ended nature of Roman imperialism in the early imperial period, the corollary should apply: now that they are dealing with regions and boundaries, they have accepted limits to their empire.⁴⁵

(4) The reference to the Tigris forming the boundary between the two powers is a further indication of the desire of the Romans to demarcate their zone of control. It may be noted in passing that there has been some confusion over the take-over of the Armenian satrapies, several of which lie east of the Tigris. It has been proposed, for instance, that Peter must be referring to a boundary south of Armenia, although clearly Roman control did not extend to all lands west of the Tigris (e.g. in Lower Mesopotamia).⁴⁶ A more satisfactory explanation would see the

⁴⁴ See Napoli 1993, 67-8, on the wall. Winter 1994, 604, rightly emphasises Diocletian's desire to fix the frontiers during these negotiations.

⁴⁵ Isaac 1992, 395, for this idea, repeated in Whittaker 2004, 3. In this context, the emergence of terms such as Gothia, Romania and Alamannia is relevant, pointing as it does to a greater attachment to a particular territory. See (e.g.) Naber 1993, 104, on this last term; on Romania, see Zeiller 1929. The appearance in the third century of the term *barbaricum* points in the same direction: on this see Scorpan 1980, 143, Chauvot 1998, 213. See Nicasie 1998, 175 n.220 for some justified criticisms of Isaac's views on this point: as he notes, most peoples with whom the Romans dealt in late antiquity were sedentary or semi-nomadic, and hence attached to a particular territory. See also Chrysos 1987, 29-30, for the emergence of terms clearly indicative of a fixed Roman territory.

⁴⁶ Blockley 1984, 32-3.

two provisions as referring to the same area. The Romans were granted control of satrapies such as Corduene and Arzanene but did not occupy them - just as was the case with the satrapies which remained in their hands after 363. Their control was only exercised loosely, presumably in conferring the insignia of office on whomever exercised control of the relevant satrapy. This would account for the fact that Ammianus could describe Corduene in 359 as being 'subject to the Persians', although its ruler, Jovinian, had been brought up in Roman territory (XVIII.6.20). Direct Roman control stopped at the Tigris and for this reason the Persians could undermine Roman influence east of the river.⁴⁷

(5) We should also briefly note the willingness of both sides to negotiate, both in 298 and in 363: in 298 the Persian ambassadors, at least according to Peter the Patrician (frg.13) likened the two powers to two lamps or two eyes, each adorned by the brightness of the other. This notion of cooperation between the two sides continued to be expressed right up until the late sixth century.⁴⁸ Despite the intransigent pronouncements of emperors and kings on occasion - we may note, for instance, references by both Arsacid and Sasanian kings to the idea of retaking all the lands once held by the Achaemenid dynasty⁴⁹ - both powers realised that it was in their interests to resolve their differences by diplomatic means. It follows that Roman emperors would generally have been prepared to acknowledge limits to the empire and to accept treaties which imposed them.

Over the fourth century such dealings between Rome and Persia continued. The treaty of 363 is well known. It too handed over specific places to the Persians (in this case, places in Mesopotamia) and gave them a right to intervene in Armenia.⁵⁰ The partition of Armenia in 387 is also relevant. Although Roger Blockley is doubtless correct in arguing that no firm boundary line existed right from the start, but only gradually emerged,⁵¹ the fact remains that some sort of carving up of the territory took place, and certain places were agreed upon as being either Roman or Persian. Furthermore, Procopius, perhaps drawing on an Armenian

⁴⁷ See the useful discussion of Winter and Dignas 2001, 150-1 (with map).

⁴⁸ Theoph. Sim. IV.11.2, cf. the references collected by Fowden 1993, 18 n.21.

⁴⁹ See (e.g.) Greatrex 1998, 11 and n.21, Wheeler 2002, 289.

⁵⁰ Details in Winter and Dignas 2001, 155-60, Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 1-9 and now Mazza 2003, 412-19.

⁵¹ Blockley 1992, 44, cf. *idem* 1987.

source, reports that the Persian-backed Armenian ruler received four times as much territory as his Roman-backed brother (*Aed.* III.1.9). By his day there was a recognisable border between Persarmenia and Roman Armenia Interior; and this proportion of territory, accepted by all modern scholars, is confirmed when a modern map is consulted.⁵² The fifth century offers further signs of a recognisable, stable frontier: the fact that the century saw hardly any warfare between the two great powers will no doubt have contributed to the consolidation of a fixed frontier. The first relevant piece of evidence comes in the form of the terms agreed at the end of the brief war of 421-2: according to Procopius (*Wars* I.2.15), the two parties agreed henceforth not to build any fortifications close to the boundary. Such a compact obviously presupposes a general agreement as to where the boundary lies, even if both sides on occasion breached the agreement.⁵³ We come next to the *Statutes of the School of Nisibis*, the rules laid down for those studying at what had formerly been the School of Edessa, forced to migrate to Persian territory sometime between the 450s and the 470s. The fourth canon states:

The fourth canon, concerning the brothers who are in the schools. They are not allowed to cross over to the country of the Romans without the word and command of the brothers and that of the master of the school, neither for the cause of instruction nor on the pretext of prayer, nor in order to buy or to sell. (A. Vööbus, ed., *The Statutes of the School of Nisibis* [Stockholm, 1967], 75-6, tr. M. Greatrex)

This rule is frequently cited by scholars interested in the porousness of the frontier: students obviously had no difficulty in visiting the Roman empire, and their tendency to do so did not meet the approval of their

⁵² See Greatrex 2000 on the 387 partition. Garsoïan 1989, 20 suggests an Armenian source for Proc. See eadem 1999: 45-6 on the frontier line after the partition (with map 1).

⁵³ See Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 42-3 (cf. Winter and Dignas 2001, 160-4) on the treaty which concluded the war with 259 n.60. Joh. Eph. *HE* VI.42, describing the situation in the late sixth century, refers to a specific distance from the frontier within which fort construction was forbidden.

superiors.⁵⁴ For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that the statutes are predicated upon a student knowing that they were leaving Persian territory and entering the Roman empire. The area around Nisibis was the scene of tense frontier negotiations only a few years later, around 485. Because of a severe drought which had lasted two years, Arabs allied to the Persians had ventured to despoil tracts of Roman territory; in response, the Romans had assembled an army 'on the frontier', according to a contemporary witness, bishop Barsauma of Nisibis. Thanks to the energetic efforts of the *marzban* at Nisibis and Barsauma, and following intensive negotiations at the border, tensions were defused. Again it emerges clearly from the letters of Barsauma, which are a contemporary witness to these events, that both sides expected even nomadic peoples, such as the Arab tribesmen, to know where the frontier lines stood and not to cross them, at any rate for the purpose of plunder.⁵⁵

To the north, in Armenia and the Caucasus, the evidence also points to awareness of a recognisable frontier. Two instances may suffice. In 456/7 the Romans were involved in a war with one of their former allies, the Lazi. When planning a campaign against the Lazi, the emperor's counsellors hesitated as to whether they should send troops to the region (the eastern coast of the Black Sea) by land, which meant going through parts of Armenia 'bordering on Persian territory' or by sea. The picture of advisers deliberating as to the movement of forces up to the front and the best route to take should not go unnoticed: a clearer example of strategic decision-making would be hard to find. We are not told which option was decided upon; the advisers were aware, however, that in order to send an army through Armenia, they would need to consult with the

⁵⁴ So Lee 1993: 58. On the chronology of the move, see Vööbus 1962, 18-19 with Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 260 n.76. See n.27 above on ease of movement across the frontier.

⁵⁵ Barsauma, *ep.*2, 526-7, tr. M. Greatrex in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 49-50. Cf. Ps.-Josh. Styl. 88 (p.308), tr. Trombley and Watt 2000, 108, reporting how, following the conclusion of an armistice in 505, the Romans punished some of their Arab allies for making 'an unauthorised crossing into Persian territory' for the sake of plunder. See also Isaac 1992, 242-3 on this sort of raiding (and the attempt to resolve it in the treaty of 562).

Persian king.⁵⁶ Not long afterwards, in the early 480s, the Caucasus was in turmoil. Encouraged by instability within the Persian kingdom, the Armenian nobles had revolted; they were quickly crushed by their Persian overlords, however. The leader of the uprising, Vahan Mamikonean, thereupon took refuge in the parts of Armenia under Roman rule. Now it was the turn of the Persians to act with circumspection: one commander, Mihran, chose to negotiate with the rebel rather than pursue him across the frontier. Others were more willing to cross into Roman territory. In all cases, our contemporary source, the Armenian historian Łazar P'arpec'i, leaves no doubt that all the generals were aware of the existence and location of the frontier. The behaviour of Vahan, exploiting the existence of this frontier, prefigures that of Atat Khorkhoruni at the end of the sixth century.⁵⁷

It is time to take stock of the evidence assembled so far. A wide range of sources, from the third century to the seventh, has been examined with the aim of demonstrating that Roman emperors, in this period at any rate, were capable of acknowledging that their empire had limits. On numerous occasions, these limits were specified: the river Tigris, for instance, could be set as the boundary of the empire. Where natural physical features, such as rivers, were lacking, a wall might indicate the frontier. In certain cases, the accounts of our sources presuppose the existence of a defineable frontier, even if they do not specify its precise trace. This is not to deny, of course, that in certain regions, notably in the barren steppe lands south of the Euphrates, no definite line existed. The evacuation of Roman fortified posts here over the fifth century led to some uncertainty as to the extent of Roman control; this provoked disputes in the 530s between Arabs allied to each power as to ownership of this region, which contributed in turn to the outbreak of a major war.⁵⁸ This willingness to accept limits is associated

⁵⁶ Priscus frg.33.1, tr. in Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 56 with 262 n.14 on the dating of the episode.

⁵⁷ Łazar P'arpec'i, tr. Thomson 1991, 172-213, esp.193 for the case of Mihran. Cf. Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 59-60.

⁵⁸ The so-called Strata dispute, on which see Proc. *Wars* II.1.1-11 with Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 102. It is interesting that Proc. describes this specifically as a dispute about 'boundaries of territory' (περὶ γῆς ὁρίων), which again implies the admission of territorial limits (contra Isaac 1993, 110-11, who insists, in discussing this region, that 'the term "boundary" is meaningless'). The uncertainty as to the

with a determination to maintain full control over all territories within those limits; it is not a coincidence that Justinian not only embarked upon an ambitious policy of erecting defences on the frontiers of his empire but also took steps to consolidate Roman rule in areas which had hitherto been little touched by imperial administration.⁵⁹ The characterisation of this policy as one of 'defensive imperialism' is broadly correct therefore. Successive emperors at Constantinople aimed to preserve their inheritance; some might also reclaim what they considered to be part of their inheritance. Occasionally, they might take over new territories, as for instance in the case of Tzanica or of the parts of Persarmenia acquired by Maurice in 591, but even these annexations may be seen as primarily defensive.⁶⁰ Strategies were formulated in order to protect imperial territories. The most obvious element was the construction of adequate fortifications on the edges of the empire in

territory of each power in this region stands in marked contrast to the situation elsewhere. Whittaker 1994, 54, Troussel 1993, 29 and Teixidor 1993 all emphasise the uncertainty surrounding the boundary of the empire here in the first century A.D., no doubt correctly.

The *V. Alex. Akoim.* offers useful evidence on Roman frontier defences in this region c.425. See Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 35-6 with Gatier 1995 and Zuckerman 1998: 117-19 (who rightly sees the series of forts along the Strata as part of a defended frontier [*limes*], contra Isaac). By the reign of Justinian, many of these forts had been abandoned, thus allowing room for doubt as to the precise extent of Roman territory. See further Key Fowden 1999, 60-6 on this region, known as the Barbaricum in the sixth century.

⁵⁹ Notably in Armenia, on which see Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 100 and Adontz 1970, ch.7. Anastasius' subjugation of the Isaurians, a refractory people theoretically within the empire's borders, in the 490s may also be considered part of the same process; see Lenski 1999, 428-9, on this war.

⁶⁰ The (new) conquest of Tzanica by Justinian represents a consolidation of territory long within the Roman orbit. The annexation of parts of Persarmenia is most plausibly interpreted as a means of better securing what had been Roman Armenia until then; it is unclear to what extent Roman rule was imposed in the territories ceded by Khusro II. As will be seen, just such a justification for Roman expansion (in Mesopotamia) was earlier offered by Septimius Severus. Cf. Howard 1991, 24, concerning the expansion of the British empire: 'The greater one's possessions, the more insecure they are likely to appear and the more pressing the requirement to take whatever measures are necessary to secure them.'

order to repel enemy attacks; naturally, the deployment of troops in these regions was also important, even if it was not always forthcoming. We thus reach the concept of a fortified frontier line or *limes*, of the type recommended by the anonymous author of the *De rebus bellicis* in a passage singled out by Constantin Zuckerman.⁶¹ Further pieces of evidence from the fifth century are brought to bear by Zuckerman, all of which serve to establish that the sort of defensive mentality being argued for here was conceivable by Romans at the time.⁶²

* * *

So far the discussion has focussed exclusively on the Roman eastern frontier. Further light may be shed on the issue of frontiers by turning now to other parts of the empire. First, however, we may venture briefly to consider the approach of Rome's great rival in the East, the Sasanians. Although some scholars play up the imperial aspirations of this dynasty,⁶³ it is impossible to detect any desire on their part to annex any Roman territories after 363, at least until Khusro II's massive invasions of the early seventh century. Roman cities were captured, in some cases then garrisoned by Persian troops, but they were always treated ultimately as bargaining counters and returned to Roman possession. No Persian king demanded territorial concessions during negotiations after 363. Evidence from other parts of the Sasanian kingdom suggests that Persian rulers too were conscious of the limits of their power and strove above all to maintain what early members of their dynasty had acquired in the third century. Later Arabic sources refer to defences erected by Shapur II, including a wall and a moat, to protect Lower Mesopotamia from raids by tribesmen.⁶⁴ To the north, the Dariel and Derbent passes were also protected by fortresses, while in the north-

⁶¹ Anon., *De rebus bellicis*, with Zuckerman 1998, 116-17, cf. Chauvot 1998, 227-9, Arce 2001, 7-9.

⁶² Zuckerman 1998, 112-24. We concentrate here upon the actual frontier lines themselves, rather than on perceptions or on terminology.

⁶³ Notably Fowden 1993, 24-36 on 'Sasanian universalism'. A more realistic assessment in Lee 1993, 21-5. See n.49 above.

⁶⁴ See Frye 1977, 7-10, Howard-Johnston 1995, 191-4, cf. the criticisms of Janniard 2001, 356. Dykes to protect Assyria from Arab raids were observed by Ammianus at Charcha near the Tigris, XXV.6.8, cf. Isaac 1992: 241.

east, kings in the fifth and sixth centuries constructed extensive walls to limit incursions by nomads from the Central Asian steppes.⁶⁵ Tabari's work confirms such a picture. He relates how king Peroz (459-84), as a result of an unsuccessful war against the Hephthalites, who were threatening Iran's north-eastern frontier, was forced to come to terms with their king, Akhshunwar. The chief condition imposed on the Persians was to establish a boundary between Persian and Hephthalite territory; this would be marked by a great trench. Peroz then swore never to cross this trench in the future.⁶⁶ In the end, Peroz broke his oath, with disastrous consequences. Tabari gives several accounts of the ensuing débacle. According to one version, Peroz reached the frontier area between the two kingdoms, where he came upon a tower set up by his predecessor Bahram V. In this account, the tower (rather than the trench) marked the border. In order not to violate his oath, Peroz then proceeded to move the tower itself as his army advanced into Hephthalite territory.⁶⁷ What stands out in both cases is the notion of a defineable frontier between the two powers. This frontier could be delineated by a trench or could at any rate be conceived and described as such, both among Romans and among Persians. As Zuckerman sensibly observes, Roman sources often speak of a *fossatum* in connection with the frontier defences of the empire; this should not be construed as necessarily referring to a concrete actualisation of the frontier as a trench. Rather, it is part of the 'imaginaire' of the frontier in the minds of contemporary writers. And as has been shown, it was a concept shared by Persians and Romans.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Details in Frye 1977, 11-15, who even speaks of a *Festung Iran* mentality prevalent among Sasanian rulers. See Lecomte 1999 on Sasanian defences east of the Caspian, Rakhmanov 1999 on the Derbent pass.

⁶⁶ Tabari, tr. Bosworth 1999, 115 (and Nöldeke 1879, 125).

⁶⁷ Tabari, tr. Bosworth 1999, 118. This version calls the Hephthalites Turks. See Nöldeke 1879, 128 n.3 and 102 on this tradition. Cf. the version at Bosworth, 115, according to which Peroz bridged the boundary trenches.

⁶⁸ Zuckerman 1998, 120-3, cf. Napoli 1993, 71-2 (on the renewed popularity of linear fortifications in the sixth century). We may also note the reference in Moses Khorenats'i to trench-building to demarcate a frontier, in this case during the reign of Probus (276-82): according to Moses (*Histoire de l'Arménie*, tr. Langlois, rev. A. and J.-P. Mahé 1993, II.77), this emperor made peace with a king Ardashir (a garbling of the Sasanian king Bahram II) and divided Armenia up between Rome and

A glance at the Danube frontier shows that the concept of a frontier line was familiar to other peoples too. We may start by citing the case of the Tervingian *iudex* Athanaric, who had sworn an oath never to cross into Roman territory; when therefore he came to make a treaty with the Romans in 369, the ceremony was held in the middle of the Danube. Athanaric thereby clearly recognised the Danube as the frontier between Gothic territory and Roman; the emperor Valens, by meeting Athanaric on the river, implicitly also acknowledged the river as the frontier.⁶⁹ Valens' brother Valentinian negotiated in similar fashion in 374 in the middle of the Rhine with the king of the Quadi, Macrianus, thereby bringing an end to hostilities between the two sides.⁷⁰ In the fifth century, Attila insisted that the Romans move their frontier back from the Danube: he asserted that he had annexed a swath of territory covering five days' travel from the Danube and decreed that the Romans were no

Persia; he dug the trenches to mark the frontier. The episode is alluded to by Wheeler 1991, 509 n.18; he is undoubtedly correct in not wanting to interpret it literally. See now Traina 2002, 456-7 and idem 2004, 211-14.

⁶⁹ Ammianus XXVII.5.9, cf. XXXI.4.13 with Lenski 2002, 126, 135-6 (citing Zosimus IV.11.4, according to whom the barbarians were forbidden henceforth to cross into Roman territory), Heather 1991, 119-20, Wolfram 1988, 68; cf. (surprisingly) Whittaker 1993, 135, noting what he terms the 'territoriality' of the barbarians (as a result of Roman influence!). We should note that the Tervingi themselves were capable of thinking in terms of defensible frontier lines: see Ammianus XXXI.3.7 for the wall erected by Athanaric to protect his people against the onslaught of the Huns with Matthews 1989, 320-1. See also Whittaker 1994, 176-89 with the map at p.177 for further boundary markers beyond the Danube; he prefers to interpret them as political markers rather than as lines of defence. So also Napoli 1993, 68, although she believes some may have served a defensive purpose, cf. Nicasie 1998, 141-3.

⁷⁰ Ammianus XXX.3.4-6 with Heather 2001, 45-6. As Heather puts it, *loc. cit.*, 'Meeting in the middle of the river more or less explicitly recognised the sovereignty of each party over its own side'. Hostilities with Macrianus had erupted because Valentinian had built forts in Macrianus' territory 'as if they were already claimed for Roman rule (*ius*)' (Ammianus XXIX.6.2), which clearly indicates that Ammianus believed that Quadic territory was not Roman, cf. Whittaker 1994, 180, 204 and Chauvot 1998, 181.

longer entitled to cultivate land in this area.⁷¹ In the sixth century likewise both Procopius and Theophylact Simocatta clearly designate the Danube as the boundary between Roman and barbarian territory.⁷² These cases suffice to show that Roman emperors, whatever their propaganda might claim, were prepared to recognise the existence of frontiers. Moreover, barbarian kings likewise made use of the concept, both in their dealings with the Romans and with one another.⁷³ This is not to say, of course, that Roman emperors confined their activities to the areas bounded by the Rhine and Danube: Ammianus, for instance, recounts numerous campaigns undertaken across the two rivers. Peter Heather has recently put forward a convincing analysis of Roman policy in this region in the late fourth century. He argues for the existence of a careful system of client-management, whereby the Romans would intervene in kingdoms beyond the frontier in order to minimise the chance of attacks against the empire. Emperors would undertake campaigns within a zone of about 100 kilometres from the frontier so as to back up their allies and punish (or deter) raiders. If we accept therefore that the Romans acknowledged the existence of a formal frontier of the empire (such as the river Danube), it does not mean that they ceased to intervene or even campaign beyond it. Even as late as the reign of Maurice, Roman troops were crossing the Danube in operations

⁷¹ Priscus, frg.11.1-18, dated by Blockley 1981, 119 to 449. Because the Huns moved westwards soon after this, the Romans quickly regained control of the territory. See also Chrysos 1987, 32, on Priscus' evidence.

⁷² See the persuasive analysis of Chrysos 1987, 30-7, citing (e.g.) Theoph. Sim. I.5.11, VII.10.5 and Proc. Wars VII.14.6.

⁷³ Much has been written on Valens' propaganda in particular, notably on Themistius' attempts to talk up the emperor's achievements. See Chauvot 1998, 189-99 (cf. 176-89 on Valentinian), Lenski 2002, 130-47. See further below.

For inter-barbarian frontiers note Ammianus XVIII.2.15 (referring to the *terminales lapides* [boundary stones] which *Alamannorum et Burgundiorum confinia distinguebant* marked the frontiers of the Alamanni and Burgundians, tr. Rolfe). The text here is uncertain, however, since some read *Romanorum* rather than *Alamannorum*. If this reading is accepted, it is still more significant, since it provides a direct refutation of Whittaker's assertion (1994, 68, cited above) that we know of no boundary markers of the Roman empire. See the commentary of Sabbah 1970, 191-2 n.147; *contra*, Matthews 1989, 307-8 and 524 n.8.

directed against the Avars.⁷⁴ Whittaker however, noting the placing of forts beyond the Danube, argues on this basis 'that the Danube was considered an administrative boundary and a fortified supply line - part of the *limes* but not the frontier, which was a far broader concept.'⁷⁵ As we have shown, the evidence assembled by Whittaker concerning military operations and fort building beyond the Danube and Rhine does not establish his contention. Furthermore, according to his interpretation, the Romans maintained an unflinching ideology of expansionism right through the fourth century, at least partly because they were incapable of developing any more realistic policy. Such a view is only possible if one accepts at face value all the blustering pronouncements of panegyrics and imperial propaganda; it fails to give sufficient weight to the events themselves, such as the negotiations on the Danube, and the more pacific declarations of contemporary authors, such as Themistius.⁷⁶

There is ample evidence therefore to suggest that the Romans practised a policy of defensive imperialism in Europe as well as on the

⁷⁴ Heather 2001, 18-63, cf. Pohl 2001, 251 and Haldon 1999, 61 on Maurice's campaigns. Details in Whitby 1988, 156-65. This is what Whittaker 1994, 169, calls 'forward control'. See also Elton 1996, 180-1, who views Roman policy as essentially defensive in the fourth and early fifth centuries, cf. *ibid.* 221: 'The Roman political objective when attacking barbarians was to force them to stop hostilities in the future', i.e. what may be termed defensive imperialism. Clearly, Roman influence in this forward zone would be considerable: see Whittaker 1994, 98-131, Carrié 1995, 44.

⁷⁵ Whittaker 1994, 183-4. But the fact that there was a zone beyond the frontier in which the Romans intervened, which one might call a 'frontier zone', does not prove that there was not a recognisable frontier. Cf. Nicasie 1998, 122; the distinction drawn between borders and frontiers by Whittaker 2004, 5-6, does nothing to clarify the issue. See also n.8 above on the term *limes*.

⁷⁶ Whittaker 1994, 194-209, strongly expressed; repeated in *idem* 1996, 30-8. Chauvot 1998 is far more nuanced, e.g. at 197 on Themistius' favourable assessment of Valens' treaty with the Goths in 369. See also Heather 2001, 52-3, 57, 61 and even Whittaker 1994, 187. Themistius elsewhere explicitly advocated renouncing the retaking of parts of Mesopotamia, *Or.* 8.114c (tr. in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 13), cf. Chauvot 1998, 199. We have already noted the debate surrounding the treatment of barbarians (n.37 above). Claudian's claim that Germany between the Rhine and Elbe had been pacified (*De cons. Stil.* I.218-31, cf. Whittaker 1994, 206) is typically excessive.

eastern frontier. But it is possible to push the debate further. According to Zosimus,

Constantine adopted another measure, which gave unimpeded access to the barbarians to the territory under Roman control. For the Roman empire, as has already been related by me, was, by the care of Diocletian, protected everywhere on its frontiers by towns and fortresses, in which the entire soldiery was placed; entry was impossible for the barbarians, there being always a sufficient force to meet and repel those who came against it. But Constantine destroyed that security by removing the greater part of the soldiers from the frontiers, and placing them in towns that had no need of defenders, thus depriving those who were exposed to the barbarians of all defence, and imposing on the towns that were quiet the trouble caused by the soldiers, on account of which many of them were completely deserted... ⁷⁷ (Zosimus II.34)

This passage has attracted much comment. It is not necessary for our purposes to discuss either the merits or drawbacks of Constantine's decision, nor even to determine how accurate Zosimus' statement is. This must be underlined, because Whittaker, in discussing this extract, draws attention to evidence which calls into question its accuracy: as he correctly points out, Constantine built many forts on both the Rhine and Danube. He then categorically rejects Ferrill's statement that Zosimus' claim is 'the most straightforward statement in ancient literature on Grand Strategy' on the grounds that it is disproved by the facts.⁷⁸ But this conclusion does not follow, even if Zosimus' assertion could be proved wrong; one might note in passing that 'straightforward statements' about issues of grand strategy will tend to be sweeping ones, and thus unlikely to be completely accurate in any case. It is the formulation of two differing approaches - strategies, in fact, for the term is appropriate - to frontier defence which is important, however much Zosimus has distorted them to denigrate Constantine and to praise Diocletian. While Diocletian (according to Zosimus) preferred to counter threats to the empire close to the frontier, an approach favoured

⁷⁷ See the comments of Paschoud 2000, 252-3 (favourable to Luttwak's views); also Carrié and Rousselle 1999, 628-34.

⁷⁸ Whittaker 1996, 33, citing Ferrill 1991, 82; cf. Whittaker 1994, 203-9 and (e.g.) Lewin 2002, 97-8, on Roman activity beyond the frontiers under the tetrarchy. Heather 2001, 57-8, rightly attaches more importance to this difference in strategy. See also Isaac 1992, 162-3.

also to some degree by Valens and Valentinian, Constantine and his immediate successors believed that a mobile reserve force was more effective, no doubt partly because it could also serve against possible usurpers.⁷⁹ Here then two alternative visions of Roman strategy are described, both aimed at best securing the protection of the imperial provinces.

Fourth-century emperors undoubtedly had the means to formulate strategy. They and their predecessors had been dealing with Parthians and Persians since the first century B.C., as also with the territories beyond the Rhine and Danube: both the peoples and their lands were familiar. The *Notitia Dignitatum* shows that a roster of troop dispositions was available, whatever its shortcomings. Emperors such as Julian and Constantius could transfer soldiers from one front to another, as the need arose.⁸⁰ In light of these points, and bearing in mind the passage of Zosimus quoted above, we may reasonably conclude that it is appropriate to speak about Roman strategy (or rather, strategies) in the period with which we have been dealing. All were conceived to best protect the frontiers of the empire, whether we choose to use the term *limes* or not. Usually they involved preclusive measures, including the deployment of Roman forces and fortifications beyond the frontier. They were generally accompanied by as much expansionist bombast as could be mustered, exploiting to the full any victories or treaties concluded, and grossly exaggerating the degree of Roman control imposed on regions beyond the frontier. But none of this calls into question either the existence of a fixed frontier or the essentially defensive nature of Roman policy.

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⁷⁹ See Treadgold 1995, 9-11, Jones 1964, 607-8, Heather 2001, 19.

⁸⁰ These points are put forward by Heather 2001, 61-5; more detail in Nicasie 1998, 155-72. As Heather observes, the defector Antoninus brought details of Roman troop dispositions to Shapur II in 359 (Ammianus XVIII.5.1), proving the existence of such details even before the publication of the *Notitia*. Cf. Lee 1993, 32-48, Arnaud 1991, 761-3. Earlier emperors too will have had information on troop dispositions and strengths: see Nicolet 1991, 178-83, Whittaker 1994, 35, Mattern 1999, 104-5.

‘Sooner or later the question of maps will impinge’.⁸¹ We have consciously postponed discussion of the topic until now, in order to demonstrate that the Romans were able to conceive of frontiers and strategy independently of whether we believe them to have had access to accurate maps of the empire or not. This point is crucial. For those who insist most strongly on the absence of any Roman strategy, it is necessary for their case to deny that the Romans had much, if any, geographical knowledge. They can then proceed to argue that it was consequently impossible for them to develop any strategy. As Isaac puts it:

It must be concluded that those who look at small-scale, or even large-scale maps, for conclusions regarding the strategy of the Romans use instruments and hence concepts that for the Romans did not exist.⁸²

Our line of argument, on the other hand, is not so reliant on linking the two issues. We shall argue for a more positive assessment of Roman geographical knowledge, but, as has been seen, our case does not depend on it. We may note incidentally that long before the Roman period peoples and states (whose access to maps is still less assured than that of the Romans) had concluded treaties about boundaries and carved up territories: the book of Joshua (12-14:5), for instance, recounts the division of the promised land among the tribes of Israel. In the mid-third millennium B.C., the neighbouring states of Umma and Lagash were in frequent dispute about boundary lines, which, according to an inscription of Lagash, had been laid down by the king of the gods himself.⁸³

⁸¹ Syme 1991, 379.

⁸² Isaac 1992, 406, cf. 448 (responding to Dilke); contrast Dilke 1985, 120. Lee 1993, 81-2, rightly rebuts some of the more exaggerated criticism that has been made of Roman geographical knowledge (e.g. by MacMullen 1976, 52-4), cf. *ibid.* 85-6. Mattern 1999 is curiously equivocal on the issue, reflecting the polarised nature of the debate: at 47 she accepts the existence of maps, but at 82 denies them. Nicasie 1998, 163-5, offers a brief survey of the issue, noting that ‘it does not seem that any useful conclusion has so far been reached’. See also now Brodersen 2004.

⁸³ See Kuhrt 1995, 42, who quotes the inscription. Cf. *ibid.* 36-7 on the famous Vulture Stele (c.2450 B.C.), which also concerns a boundary war between the two states. See also Traina 2004, 208-10, on Armenian and Persian attitudes to boundaries and the importance attached to preserving their integrity. Cf. Millar 1987,

As we have just noted, for some modern scholars, the Romans had a very limited knowledge of geography; Benjamin Isaac is a leading proponent of such a view. As he sees it, 'the Romans did not have a sufficiently clear or accurate notion of topographical realities to conceive of the overall military situation in global strategic terms.'⁸⁴ We have already marshalled evidence to suggest that global strategic thinking was not beyond the Romans' capability, however they perceived or represented the world, but it is important nonetheless not to let Isaac's downbeat assessment of Roman geography go unchallenged.

It must be admitted at the outset that the direct evidence for Roman maps is exiguous. The few maps that go back to Roman times to have survived have been discussed at length by many scholars. On the one hand, there are large-scale maps, such as the *Forma Urbis*, preserved in fragments, and the Orange cadaster. Although some scholars would deny such representations the name of 'map', on the grounds of the absence of a scale (and because the scale varies from one part of the map to another), this objection seems unduly restrictive: as Ekkehard Weber has pointed out, even modern maps contain variations in scale.⁸⁵ In this context, we should mention the illustrations that accompany the works of the *agrimensores* in certain manuscripts; some of these offer colour representations of cities, rivers, roads and mountains. Their dating is

110, on boundary treaties and cartography in this period. Brodersen 2003, 139-40, cites an interesting case of the use of maps in China in the third century B.C.

⁸⁴ Isaac 1992, 401-2, cf. Millar 1982, 17-18 (somewhat more cautious), Mattern 1999, 41-66 (also cautious, but negative for the most part). It is worth noting in passing that even as late as the early nineteenth century the geographical information available to commanders was minimal: the Duke of Wellington often relied on autopsy to gain knowledge of the surrounding region, both in Spain and India (cf. Elting 1988, 113-14, on the French side). Yet as Keegan 1987, 135, notes, '[h]is maplessness may not have been altogether the frustration we imagine', since he was able to build up his own mental map of his surroundings; cf. Bertrand 1997, 115-18 on Julius Caesar proceeding thus in Gaul. Whittaker 2004, 74-6, rightly accepts that the Romans did not lack any 'map consciousness', but rather had a different way of conceiving of their surroundings.

⁸⁵ Weber 1996, 266 n.23 (part of a critical review of Brodersen 1995), cf. Hänger 2001, 19, 46. On these maps, see Hänger 2001, 21-48, Dilke 1987b, 209-11, idem 1987c, 220-30, Brodersen 2003, 225-36. On the question of a consistent scale see also Janni 1984, 64-5 and Dilke 1985, 120 (playing down its importance).

uncertain, but it is believed that they go back to the sixth century at least. Even if their accuracy is questionable, they testify both to a tradition of 'topographic landscape painting' and, in general, to what we might call map literacy; for neither these illustrations nor those on itineraries like the *Tabula Peutingerana* (discussed below) were accompanied by a key, and so it follows that the reader could be expected to interpret the symbols without difficulty.⁸⁶ At the other end of the spectrum are small-scale maps, almost invariably of the whole world (the *orbis terrarum* or *oikoumene*). These will briefly be discussed below, since their existence has to be inferred: no such map has survived from earlier than the sixth century A.D.⁸⁷ The surviving sections of the Madaba map, a mosaic from the 'cathedral' church at Madaba in modern Jordan, offer a representation of parts of Palestine and Egypt, no doubt for the edification of pilgrims.⁸⁸ An Egyptian papyrus of the first century B.C. or A.D. contains a sketch of Spain, but uncertainty prevails as to how to interpret precisely the features depicted.⁸⁹ Notwithstanding these instances, there is general consensus that the Romans lacked any sort of

⁸⁶ On the *Corpus Agrimensorum* see now Campbell 2000, esp. xxiii-xxvi (quotation from xxiv); cf. the illustrations on pp.303-4; also Dilke 1987c, 217-20, Hänger 2001, 45-8. The point about map literacy is ably made by Hänger 2001, *loc. cit.* The use of *agrimensores* in military contexts is significant: we hear of the activities of a certain Balbus during a Dacian campaign, who was occupied in measuring the width of rivers and the height of mountains, cf. Hänger 2001, 51, Campbell 2000, xxxix-xl with Sherk 1974, 541, 544-8 and Arnaud 1991, 782. Whittaker 2004, 69, is more sceptical of the relevance of Balbus.

⁸⁷ One manuscript of the text of Cosmas Indicopleustes offers a very schematic rectangular map of the world which is believed to go back to Cosmas' time. See Wolska-Conus 1978, 84, Prontera 2001, 223-4 (with illustration).

⁸⁸ See the papers in Piccirillo and Alliata 1998, Warland 1992. Brodersen 2001, 11-12, is typically dismissive of the map's accuracy (highlighting its varying scale), cf. *idem* 2003, 149-51. The sixth-century mosaic 'map' at Nicopolis is highly schematic and not relevant here; see Kitzing 1951, 100-8.

⁸⁹ Publication in Gallazzi and Kramer 1998. Discussion in Brodersen 1999, 3-4, Brodersen 2001, 16 (interpreting it as a forerunner of the *itineraria picta*). See however now Moret 2003, who persuasively argues that this map may not represent Spain at all: since no places are labelled, the identification will inevitably remain problematic.

regional maps: one could not hope to find a specific map of Gaul or Italy, for instance.⁹⁰

Itineraries are a somewhat different case. They too have attracted increasing attention in recent years. But here more unanimity is in evidence: no one doubts that they were an important tool for many Romans in finding their way across the empire. Probably this is due to the fact that the evidence for their existence and use is more extensive; the *Tabula Peutingerana* provides a glimpse of how such itineraries might be represented.⁹¹ Those who would play down the strategic ability and cartographic capacity of the Romans concentrate upon these itineraries and, taking up a term popularised by Janni, argue that they were hampered by their 'hodological' (or 'topographical') concept of space: they could perceive the world only in terms of routes and points along them.⁹² The evidence for Roman strategy in the late empire assembled above should go some way to challenge this view; moreover, other scholars, notably Christian Hänger, have analysed Roman campaigns in Germany during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius and

⁹⁰ Bekker-Nielsen 1988, 155, Nicolet 1991, 72, Prontera 2001, 210, 214, 217, cf. Hänger 2001, 54-7, 62, 157, 162, Brodersen 2003, 164-94. As Hänger notes, however, details about provinces might be offered instead in list form. We may also note references to a map of Italy in the Temple of Tellus at Rome: Whittaker 1994, 32, Prontera 2001, 214, Brodersen 2003, 152-5.

⁹¹ Dilke 1985, 113-20, idem 1987d, 234-42, Brodersen 2001, 14-19, Hänger 2001, ch.3, Salway 2001 and idem 2005. One may also note the odd case of the 'Dura shield', on which see Brodersen 2001, 15-16, idem 2003, 145-8, Hänger 2001, 107-10, Arnaud 1988 and 1989 (who likens it to a *mappa mundi*) and now Salway 2004, 92-5. It appears to be an itinerary or *periplous* of the Black Sea.

⁹² Janni 1984, 21-2 and part II, cf. idem 1999, 39-40 (reviewing Brodersen 1995) taken up (e.g.) by Talbert 1992, Arnaud 1993, 49-51, Mattern 1999, 53, Brodersen 2003, 108-9 and now Whittaker 2004, 64-76; Nicolet 1991, 70, is more nuanced. Brodersen 2001, 18-19, uses the term topographical, drawing the analogy of a map of the London underground. See also Lee 1993, 85-7. The undue weight placed on this concept stems partly from the (justified) desire not to attribute modern (i.e. anachronistic) ideas of space and its representations to the ancients, as Lee 1993, 87 n.28, notes. How the notion of continuous frontiers fits with such linear plans is unclear, although the *Tabula Peutingerana* does indicate two (one being a *finis Romanorum*) in the east, cf. Whittaker 1994, 68, Troussset 1993, 30 (with an illustration), Arnaud 1993, 47 and Hänger 2001, 105.

concluded that their conduct and planning clearly point to the use of maps (rather than itineraries).⁹³

For representations of the world we are forced to rely on references and allusions in the sources. Maps may well have been included alongside geographical texts, but since their production was a specialist field, they were more likely not to be copied and thus to disappear.⁹⁴ Before we briefly look over the evidence for Roman maps, we should glance at some material from an earlier period. Already in the sixth century B.C. the Ionians began to produce maps; Herodotus (V.49) refers to a map of the Persian empire in the possession of the Milesian leader Aristagoras. Likewise, Aristophanes in the *Clouds* portrays Socrates and a student surveying a map. Aujac draws the following conclusion:

The passage demonstrates that large-scale cadastral maps and maps of the world were known to an audience of fifth-century Athenians and that the power of the map as metaphor was realized.⁹⁵

The nature of these maps and developments which took place in the Hellenistic period need not detain us here. However, this evidence places the burden firmly on those who would seek to deny that the Romans had

⁹³ Hänger 2001, 189-91, 222-3, see further below. Cf. Syme 1991, 388, 395. Cf. the pincer movement against the Alamanni employed in 357 by Julian and Barbatio, noted by Nicasie 1998, 165-6, Elton 1996, 221. Janniard 2001, 353, finds fault with Nicasie's use of this example, noting that the offensive went awry and that Barbatio was lucky to escape from Alamannic territory. However, Nicasie fully acknowledges this: the point is that the manoeuvre required careful planning and sufficient knowledge of the enemy's territory.

⁹⁴ So Hänger 2001, 19. Ptolemy's work, we may note, provided the data necessary for the preparation of maps, cf. Dilke 1987, 183, Wolska-Conus 1978, 172; whether or not the original work was accompanied by such maps is uncertain, Dilke 1987, 189-90.

⁹⁵ Aujac 1987a, 138, citing Aristoph. *Clouds*, 200-17. *Ibid.* for further references. Cf. Wolska-Conus 1978, 158. This is a crucial point, implicitly denied by Mattern 1999, 26, when she points out that a bird's eye view was unavailable to the ancients: the concept of a such a perspective was clearly known to them. See also Brodersen 2003, 71-2, cf. *ibid.* 78-80 and 237-42, playing down the usefulness of Herodotus' map.

access to any maps whatsoever. As it turns out, our sources offer numerous references to maps. Dionysius Periegetes' description of the world, produced in the second century A.D. and a popular textbook for students, was equipped with a map, Cassiodorus tells us.⁹⁶ Eumenius' panegyric delivered in the late 290s also refers to a map, in Autun, set up in a portico for the edification of students.⁹⁷ Vegetius refers to *itineraria* on which not only routes, but also other features of the landscape like rivers and mountains, are represented.⁹⁸ From the high empire, it is the so-called Map of Agrippa that dominates discussions. Most, though not all, scholars believe it to have been a map of the type described by Eumenius, designed to highlight the extent of Rome's dominions.⁹⁹ The

⁹⁶ Cassiodorus, *Instit.* I.25 (p.66), cf. Wolska-Conus 1978, 173, 207, Aujac 1987b, 171-3 (noting that annotations to the manuscript point out discrepancies between the map which accompanied the work and the poem itself), Arnaud 1983, 690, Whittaker 1994, 15-16, Prontera 2001, 216. See also Arnaud 1983: 699, noting that Dionysius' work is in fact an *ekphrasis*, a verse description of an observed *mappa mundi*, and Lee 1993, 83-4 (on geographical education in late antiquity). Brodersen 2003, 84-5, 95-8, sees it as route-based, however.

⁹⁷ *Pan. Lat.* IX.20.2, on which see (e.g.) Wolska-Conus 1978, 166, Lee 1993, 84-5, Chauvot 1998, 51-3, Hänger 2001, 155-6, Salway 2005, 128-9 and the notes of Nixon and Rogers 1994, 148. Brodersen 2003, 106-7, doubts that there were such maps, however.

⁹⁸ Vegetius III.6.4, tr. Milner 1996, on which see Syme 1991, 379, setting much store by the reference, cf. Nicasie 1998, 163 (*contra* Isaac 1992, 402 who believes that Vegetius is referring only to a conventional itinerary, cf. Janni 1984, 31-2 and Bertrand 1997, 110). Whittaker 2004, 71, goes so far as to assert, quite incorrectly, that Vegetius' maps referred 'only to set routes and shortcuts, not to general topographic features'. Vegetius' reference is associated by Campbell 2000, xxiv, with the sort of illustrations found in the *Corpus agrimensorum*. See also Arnaud 1991, 745-76, an important discussion of Vegetius' reference and the sort of maps available to Roman commanders.

⁹⁹ On Agrippa's map see (e.g.) Dilke 1985, 41-53, idem 1987b, 207-9, Nicolet 1991, 95-122, Mattern 1999, 49-51, Prontera, 2001, 210-12, Brodersen 2003, 268-87. A map commissioned by Theodosius II may have been based on Agrippa's: see Wolska-Conus 1978, 195-7, Dilke 1987e, 258-60, Lee 1993, 85. We pass over earlier references to maps, on which see (e.g.) Dilke 1987b, 204-5. Wheeler 1993, 237 and n.222 notes references in George of Pisidia to Heraclius' use of maps in the seventh century.

case of Mettius Pompasianus during the reign of Domitian, executed for possessing a map of the world (or circulating one) seems to confirm the existence of maps, as does the habit of various writers, such as Strabo, of likening regions to geometric shapes.¹⁰⁰

This limited discussion of Roman cartography has but a modest aim, that is to show that it is at least plausible, if not highly probable, that the Romans had access to maps. It is not a point that is capable of complete proof at the moment, but it is clear at any rate that the later one goes, the stronger the case is, especially for the sixth century. We entered into this discussion because, as we noted, those who affirm that the Romans were not capable of developing a strategy for their empire must deny their ability to produce maps.¹⁰¹ One of their means of casting doubt on the existence of maps and on the capacity (and indeed willingness) of the Romans to plan strategically is to cite instances of campaigns which went awry or, if they did not end in failure, succeeded more through luck than by good judgement. To some extent, much depends upon how one reads the evidence: for Isaac, the failed military undertakings under Augustus (for instance) can generally be ascribed to a lack of intelligence. Augustus' generals simply set off without adequate knowledge of their surroundings.¹⁰² Sir Ronald Syme, on the other

¹⁰⁰ On Mettius see Arnaud 1983 and Hänger 2001, 154. Comparison to geometric forms: Janni 1984, 46-9 (who, however, does not think it is paralleled by modern comparisons), Aujac 1987, 174, Wolska-Conus 1978, 173 and Geus 2004, 21-6 (on Eratosthenes). Hänger 2001, 129-35 (on Strabo), cf. 146-7 (on Pomponius Mela, also thought to have used a map). The case of Pliny is less certain, Dilke 1987d, 243, Hänger 2001, 137-45. On Polybius' geographical thinking, by no means restricted to a linear view, see Clarke 1999, 101-8 (*contra*, Whittaker 2004, 86 n.121). See also Wheeler 1993, 238-9, for further instances of Roman thinking in 'geostrategic' terms (and cf. the case of Septimius Severus, discussed below).

¹⁰¹ A variant might be to claim that maps were more for edification and distraction than for practical purposes. So Janni 1984, 29-30, cf. Brodersen 2003, 78-81; *contra*, Sherk 1974, 559 (rejected explicitly by Janni 1984, 39). Cf. Salway 2005, 122-3, suggesting that the *Tabula Peutingeriana* may itself have been a display item.

¹⁰² Isaac 1992, 403. Similar formulation in Whittaker 1994, 66-7, where he argues that the frontiers acted as an information barrier. This is particularly ironic, given his insistence on the permeability of frontiers elsewhere.

hand, writing almost at the same time as Isaac and about the same period, states:

As in previous wars, it was not ignorance of geography that caused defeats but arrogance and obstinacy or miscalculation of a personal and political order.¹⁰³

A closer analysis of two frequently discussed cases will help clarify the issue.

First, the case of Nero's projected expedition to the Caucasus at the end of his reign.¹⁰⁴ This is particularly interesting case because Pliny the Elder recounts the preparation of maps (or at any rate *situs depicti*)¹⁰⁵ of the Caucasus region during the time of Corbulo's campaigns here. According to Pliny,

In this place we must correct a mistake made by many people, even those who recently served with Corbulo in the war in Armenia. These have given the name of Caspian Gates to the pass in Iberia, which, as we have stated, is called the Gates of the Caucasus, and maps (or 'sketches', Isaac) of the region sent home from the front have this name on them. Also the expedition threatened by the Emperor Nero was spoken of as intended to penetrate to the Caspian Gates, whereas it was really aimed at the pass that gives a road through Iberia to Sarmatia, the mountain barrier affording scarcely any access to the Caspian Sea. There are however other Caspian Gates adjoining the Caspian tribes; the distinction between the two passes can only be established by means of the report of those who accompanied the expedition of Alexander the Great. (Pliny, *HN* VI.40, tr. H. Rackham.)

Isaac takes an extremely negative view of this passage, noting that according to Tacitus (*Hist.* I.6.2), Nero's projected campaign was

¹⁰³ Syme 1991, 388-9 (on Varus), cf. 380 (on eastern campaigns). Isaac 1992, 447-8, notes Syme's article but barely responds to it (save to play down Roman access to maps).

¹⁰⁴ In general, see Sherk 1974, 559-60, Kolendo 1982, Braund 1986, 45-6, Mattern 1999, 95 and n.62.

¹⁰⁵ Isaac 1992, 404 prefers to translate 'sketches' in his quotation of the passage. See Nicolet 1991, 91 n.15. On this extract of Pliny see Millar 1982, 17-18, Arnaud 1983, 695-6, Austin and Rankov 1995, 114, Bertrand 1997, 109, Mattern 1999, 28, 37. See also Syme 1991, 379-80 and Arnaud 1991, 794-7, who believe that these *situs depicti* would have been of little military use.

destined for the Caspian Gates and to attack the Albanians. His criticisms may be summarised as follows:

- (1) The Caspian Gates do not 'lead to the Albani'.
- (2) Neither Pliny nor Tacitus appears to be able to explain 'where Nero's expedition was actually intended to go.'
- (3) Pliny's attempt to correct earlier misconceptions is flawed - 'confused but diligent', in Isaac's words.
- (4) Pliny found better information in accounts of Alexander's campaigns (and had greater trust in them) than in the *situs depicti* sent back by Roman commanders.¹⁰⁶

These criticisms are unjustified and unfair. To take (1) and (4) first, the location of the Caspian Gates was (and remains) a complex matter. In the period of late antiquity, the term was used with deliberate ambiguity in negotiations between Rome and Persia, referring either to the Derbent or Dariel passes through the Caucasus mountains.¹⁰⁷ However, as Isaac accepts, here they clearly are used to refer to the Dariel pass through the centre of the Caucasus range, leading from Iberia northwards into the territory of the Sarmatians (and Alans). Pliny rightly criticises the term Caspian Gates here because, as he has noted, it was earlier used of the pass across Mount Caspius in northern Iran.¹⁰⁸ Points (3) and (4) are therefore unfair and invalid. Pliny is, on the contrary, well aware that there are several passes in question (although he omits the Derbent pass, which is noted by Tacitus, *Ann.* VI.23), and he is merely trying to ensure that they are correctly designated. His quarrel is over terminology, for which historical research going back to Alexander's age is required. Nor can point (2) withstand close scrutiny. We must bear in mind that Nero's expedition never took place. Plans for some sort of expedition were clearly laid, but there is no reason to suppose that the troops sent ever reached the East; they were hastily recalled to deal with Vindex's revolt (Tacitus, *Hist.* I.6). Who could therefore say with certainty what Nero's objective was? It may have been a desire to model himself upon the successes of Alexander, or it could have been to make an attack on the Alani (if Tacitus' text is emended from Albani, as Mommsen

¹⁰⁶ Isaac 1992, 404-5.

¹⁰⁷ See Greatrex 1998, 15 and the more detailed comments of Synelli 1986, 99-106.

¹⁰⁸ See Halfmann 1986, 43-4 (with a useful map), cf. Kolendo 1982, 24-5.

suggested); this at any rate fits in with other information at our disposal, since we know that the Alans raided Parthian territory in 72 and that the Romans helped construct a fortress at Harmozica, not far from the Dariel pass, in 75.¹⁰⁹ If anything, the limited information at our disposal hints rather at a good grasp of the region and the means of controlling it; we may further note that Corbulo during his campaigns in the 60s was well informed even about events east of the Caspian Sea (Tacitus, *Ann.* XIII.37).

One other case deserves our attention. In 198 the Emperor Septimius Severus, having defeated all his rivals for the throne, undertook an expedition against the Parthians. From Nisibis, a city just now coming under Roman control, he set off with his army down the Euphrates by boat. He soon reached Seleucia and Babylon, which had been abandoned, and then seized Ctesiphon. He sacked the city, taking many prisoners.

He did not, however, pursue Vologaeses (the Parthian king), nor even occupy Ctesiphon, but, just as if the sole purpose of his campaign had been to plunder this place, he was off again, owing partly to lack of acquaintance with the country and partly to the dearth of provisions. (Dio Cassius LXXVI.9, tr. E. Cary, p.219.)

He therefore withdrew northwards by a different route.¹¹⁰ This episode is singled out by those who argue that the Romans had little or no concept of strategy and no access to maps.¹¹¹ It is far from clear, however, that such a conclusion is justified, any more than it is in the case of Julian's abortive invasion. To quote Syme again, 'When emperors embarked on invasions of Mesopotamia it did not prove an arduous task of planning and transport to conduct the legions as far as

¹⁰⁹ See Kolendo 1982 on Nero's motives, arguing for a grandiose scheme to emulate Alexander; Kolendo, *ibid.* 28 n.11 and Isaac 1992, 404 n.167 oppose Mommsen's emendation. See also Wheeler 1993, 238. To be sure, the emperor's parallel project in Ethiopia, also reported by Pliny, implies a policy of spectacular conquest, cf. Mattern 1999, 37; we may note incidentally that in the case of Ethiopia too, a *forma* (a plan) was prepared by an expedition (on which see Arnaud 1991, 784-94). See also Halfmann 1986 on the Alans.

¹¹⁰ See Millar 1993, 121, Birley 1988, 130.

¹¹¹ Isaac 1992, 401-2, cf. Whittaker 1994, 67 and Lee 1993, 85.

Ctesiphon.¹¹² By Severus' time (and still more so by the period of Julian) the Romans were long familiar with Lower Mesopotamia. It is possible, as Lee suggests, that they were better able to orientate themselves in this region because of the greater density of habitation and cities, a type of environment more familiar to them.¹¹³ More importantly, however, the fact is that generals and emperors had engaged in campaigning here on numerous occasions. They will have had access not only to the *commentarii* of earlier generals but also to itineraries, such as that of Isidore of Charax.¹¹⁴ To be sure, there was also much outdated and inaccurate information available: not only Pliny, but also historians such as Sallust and Ammianus, had a tendency, when dealing with geographical matters, to prefer older to more recent sources.¹¹⁵ Such polished and antiquated accounts, which have a better survival rate than *commentarii*, for instance, must not lead us to infer a dearth of more up-to-date geographical information.

What then of Severus' invasion of Parthia? Dio Cassius implies that there was another motive for the expedition than simply to plunder Persian territory, although he fails to be more precise. Isaac, seizing upon this, argues that many Roman campaigns had no clear objectives (including, for instance, Julian's invasion in 363).¹¹⁶ We do not have to go far, however, to find a plausible objective for both Severus and Julian.

¹¹² Syme 1991, 380, quoted by Lee 1993, 88 n.35.

¹¹³ Lee 1993, 89.

¹¹⁴ See Austin and Rankov 1995, 117-18 on the *commentarii*, cf. Dilke 1987d, 252-4, and Sherk 1974, 536-43 (probably overestimating the extent of information-gathering). See Syme 1991, 380 and Nicolet 1991, 86 on Pliny and Corbulo's *commentarii*. See also above n.86 on Balbus, an *agrimensor*, involved in the conquest of Dacia. On the military nature of Isidore of Charax's *Parthian Stations*, Austin and Rankov 1995, 115-16, cf. Millar 1998, 120 and Mattern 1999, 34 (seeing the work as part of eastern reconnaissance during Augustus' reign).

¹¹⁵ As Syme 1991, 372-9, emphasises, cf. Braund 1986 (on the 'fantasy-space' supposed to exist outside the empire, serving sometimes to justify further conquest) and Mattern 1999, 26, 53, 78-9. Cf. Isaac 1992, 405-6 pouring scorn on Dio's account of Scotland and on Ammianus' digression on Persia (as does MacMullen 1976, 52-4). Lee 1993, 82-4, reconstructs popular perceptions of geography in the sixth century, which were not necessarily as inaccurate as might be inferred from Cosmas' peculiar map (on which see n.87 above).

¹¹⁶ Isaac 1992, 405-6, cf. 381 on Severus' motives.

First, we should note that neither Julian's nor Severus' expeditions were unprovoked: the former was reacting to decades of constant Persian aggression during Constantius' reign, while the latter was aware that one of his rivals, Pescennius Niger, had received support from the Parthians, who had also recently tried to capture Nisibis.¹¹⁷ What was the aim of their invasions? The defeat of Parthia or Persia, presumably. Given that the enemy had shown ample signs of activity in the preceding years, it was not unreasonable to suppose that they would meet the invader in the field. A decisive victory would allow the Romans to dictate conditions to the vanquished and bring security to their territories.¹¹⁸ It turned out, however, that in both cases the enemy was unwilling to risk an engagement; there was thus little for the invaders to do. Likewise, in 1812 Napoleon found himself baffled and vulnerable when the Russians evacuated Moscow and burnt much of the city. Severus' alleged ignorance of the lands around Ctesiphon should not be seen as an indication of Roman ineptitude in strategic matters, as Isaac asserts.¹¹⁹ Rather, as Rankov and Austin note, itineraries and earlier accounts may not have been sufficiently up-to-date to provide the relevant information; and Severus arrived in Ctesiphon in January, an unusual time of year to be campaigning deep in Persian territory. Like Napoleon and (perhaps) Julian, he may have counted on victory to secure him the supplies he needed and found himself thwarted by his enemy's determination and willingness to sacrifice their capital. A strategic miscalculation, certainly, but not an absence of strategy.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ See (e.g.) Blockley 1992, 14-24, on Constantius' wars in the East. On Parthian threats in Severus' time see Birley 1988, 115, Ross 2001, 46-53. Kennedy 1996, 83, concedes Parthian responsibility for Severus' attack in 198.

¹¹⁸ As Severus famously argued in favour of his annexation of Mesopotamia, an argument rejected by Isaac and Millar. See further below p. 143.

¹¹⁹ Isaac 1992, 405, cf. Whittaker 2004, 81. For the parallel between Napoleon and Julian see Nicasie 168-9 and nn.203, 205, who ascribes Shapur's victory to Persian cunning rather than faulty planning on Julian's part.

¹²⁰ Austin and Rankov 1995, 120, cf. 38. This is, in essence, the conclusion of Syme 1991, 380: 'What to do next [*sc.* having reached Ctesiphon] and how to return, such was the fateful problem that confronted Trajan and Julian.' Over-confidence and errors of judgement rather than lack of information were more often responsible for Roman defeats, *ibid.* 378.

These instances suffice to refute the theory that the Romans were woefully ill-informed about their world. Egregious errors can indeed be found in literary sources, but a close examination of the conduct of operations points instead to a good grasp of geography and strategy.¹²¹ It remains finally to determine whether it is appropriate to attribute a strategy to the first Roman emperors and to what extent they were interested in establishing frontiers for their empire.

* * *

We have established earlier that there is good reason to believe in the existence of a Roman strategy, or rather strategies, in late antiquity. By way of a coda, we propose to examine whether the same arguments may be applied to the early Roman imperial period. We must also consider whether the notion of defensive imperialism is appropriate at a time when Roman power was greater than it was subsequently. This is a broad topic on which much has been written; our analysis can do no more than survey some of the most important pieces of evidence. It will emerge that it is possible to attribute a generally defensive posture to the Romans, even from as early as the reign of Augustus. Such a conclusion is hardly new - theories of Roman defensive imperialism go back to the nineteenth century - but is somewhat out of step with recent approaches to the topic.¹²²

¹²¹ We have concentrated on Mesopotamia, but a similar point is made for the Rhine and Danube frontiers by Syme 1991, 390-7, cf. Hänger 2001, ch.6. We might note in passing Priscus' reference (frg.11.2.596-619) to Hunnic geographical knowledge, which, from his description, appears considerable. See also Nicasie 1998, 163, who at least partially cuts the Gordian knot by noting that in the late empire many of the campaigns fought by the Romans were within the territory of the empire in any case and thus in familiar lands.

¹²² See Cornell 1993, 140-1, on earlier views. Right from the start, the Romans believed that they only undertook defensive wars: see Harris 1979, 163-6, Rich 1993. This is, of course, a separate matter from whether they did actually do so or not. Mattern 1999, 214-15, argues that this is what the Romans themselves believed, although in fact it was their reputation and honour which mattered most.

Towards the end of the second century A.D., Septimius Severus annexed the province of Mesopotamia.¹²³ The contemporary historian Dio Cassius offers the following commentary on Severus' conquest:

Severus used to declare that he had added a vast territory to the empire and had made it a bulwark of Syria. On the contrary, it is shown by the facts themselves that this conquest has been a source of constant wars and great expense to us. For it yields very little and uses up vast sums; and now that we have reached out to peoples who are neighbours of the Medes and Parthians rather than ourselves, we are always, one might say, fighting the battles of those peoples. (Dio Cassius LXXV.3.2-3, tr. E. Cary)

This rejection by Dio of Severus' strategy has attracted much comment.¹²⁴ For our purposes, it matters little whether Dio or Severus is right; we may note in passing that there is much more to be said for Severus' ideas than either Dio or modern scholars have been prepared to acknowledge. The fact is that in order to make such a statement, one must have at least some broad idea of the geopolitics of the Near East. The idea of annexing Mesopotamia to protect the Syrian heartlands of the empire in the East makes perfect sense when looking at a modern map of the empire. Whether or not Severus was able to consult something similar, he was clearly capable of strategic thought and, equally importantly, of thinking defensively.¹²⁵ Despite his incursions deep into Parthian territory, noted already, it is clear that it was not his

¹²³ See Millar 1993, 124-6, Ross 2001, 46-56.

¹²⁴ See Millar 1982, 1, cf. Isaac 1992, 394-5 (highly critical of Severus), Campbell 1993, 220. This passage seems flatly to contradict the assertion of Whittaker 1994, 69, 'There is no hint of a scientific assessment of the strategic advantages and disadvantages of Trajan's annexations of Dacia and Mesopotamia'. Whittaker 1996, 37-8, noting the passage, seems belatedly to realise the problem. Dio's criticisms of Severus recall Lord Salisbury's remark about his military advisers - 'that if they had their way they would garrison the moon to protect us from an attack from Mars' (quoted by Howard 1991, 23).

¹²⁵ See Wheeler 1993, 18, 224, emphasising the defensive nature of Severus' statement (esp. the word *probolos*), cf. the acknowledgement by Whittaker 1996, 37-8. Birley 1974, 23-5, arguing on the basis of references to Severus as *propagator imperii* (and cited by Whittaker, *ibid.*) sees him as an expansionist. This is to mistake propaganda for policy; see further below.

intention to extend the Roman empire ever further east. The annexation of Mesopotamia, no doubt controversial at the time, was justified not in terms of an inexorable advance of the empire, but rather as a means to preserve what had been won already. With hindsight, of course, it is clear that the damage inflicted on the tottering Parthian dynasty and the incorporation of substantial parts of Upper Mesopotamia into the Roman empire served first to establish the Sasanians in power and then to fuel their expansionist drive towards the west. Thus Dio's criticisms were to some extent fulfilled, although it is probable that Shapur I would have attacked the Roman empire whether or not it had taken over Mesopotamia.

How typical is Severus of emperors of the first three centuries A.D.? Were all Romans, and not just certain court poets, firm adherents of the Vergilian doctrine of boundless ('sine fine') empire? Many scholars favour such a view, insisting strongly on the 'ideology' of conquest, which trumps all other considerations (including rational decision-making).¹²⁶ These hard-liners, as we have seen, recognise no (temporal) bounds to this attitude: not only do they discount the case of Severus, just cited, but they believe that, in spite of their declining power, the Romans maintained such an attitude beyond even the fall of the western empire.¹²⁷ Other scholars, while accepting that the first emperors pursued an aggressive policy, are willing to acknowledge a shift in attitudes over the second century; certainly, several frequently cited sections of Aelius Aristides and Appian point towards a markedly defensive attitude.¹²⁸ It is possible, however, to argue for such a

¹²⁶ See esp. Isaac 1992, 1993, 113, Whittaker 1994, 29-32, 36, 198-202, Whittaker 1996, 30-1. Cf. Hanson 2002, 25-7 and the criticisms of Wheeler 2002, 287.

¹²⁷ Isaac, 1992, 394-5 (rejecting Severus' arguments) and see the references in the preceding note.

¹²⁸ Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 24 (*Ad Rom.*) 81-2, Appian, *proem.* 7. See Birley 1974, 17-19 (although he believes that Marcus Aurelius wanted to expand the frontiers, *ibid.* 19-22), Woolf 1993, 184-5, Potter 1996, 53-6, Ando 1999, 325, 330-5, on this. Halfmann 1994, 583-7, interestingly finds traces of such an attitude even earlier, already under Trajan. Whittaker 1994, 36-7, 63, 68, tends to dismiss these cases as representing a minority view. See also Mattern 1999, 198-201 (suggesting that the sources in question reflect a more Greek attitude) and Brunt 1990b, 465-7, 475-7. Gabba 1989, 504-9, sees in Arrian's *Acies contra Alanos* and Aristides'

defensive policy right from the reign of Augustus, as we shall attempt here.

Before we examine the case of Augustus in detail, it is important to emphasise a point which has become obscured in the heat of the debate. The dichotomy posited by some advocates of the 'ideology' view, between ideology on the one hand and strategy on the other, is patently false. Ambitious, even unrealistic, ideologies have frequently co-existed with far more restrained and pragmatic policies (i.e. strategies). Two twentieth century parallels may suffice to prove the point. The Soviet Union long maintained a tradition of fomenting worldwide revolution, for instance through the Communist International (Comintern), seeking thereby to bring down bourgeois governments. Yet at the same time as it supported communists in other countries, it undermined their efforts by pursuing a more traditional foreign policy and concluding agreements with these same governments. There was thus a widening gap in the 1920s and 1930s between the pronouncements of some members of the government of the Soviet Union and the actual policies pursued.¹²⁹ The British claim to naval pre-eminence, epitomised in 'Britannia rules the waves', persisted for much of the twentieth century, despite the Washington Treaty of 1922 which effectively conceded British dominance of the seas. By 1940, the British navy was forced to supplement its fleet with obsolete American destroyers. Nevertheless in August 1942, when, despite intensive aerial bombardment, five British merchant ships broke the siege of Malta and reached the harbour, they were greeted by the bands playing 'Rule Britannia', however much the siege itself and the huge losses inflicted on the British navy during it implied the reverse. Even today, the singing of Thomas Arne's setting of the text remains a popular feature of the last night of the Proms, however implausible the idea of Britannia ruling the waves may now be.¹³⁰ In just the same way,

speech a source for reconstructing Roman strategy in the period. Frézouls 1994, 404-6, argues that the frontiers became fixed as the client kingdoms were absorbed; so also Gabba 1989, 501.

¹²⁹ See Gorodetsky 1994, esp.31, contrasting the zeal for worldwide revolution of Trotsky and the more realistic approach of Stalin. Cf. Zwick 1990, 16-18, 30-1.

¹³⁰ On the Washington Treaty, soon abandoned, see Davies 1999, 892, Morris 1978, 217. Before the treaty, the British had aimed to maintain a navy more than equal to the navies of the next two great powers; by the treaty, the British navy was put on a par with the American. Siege of Malta: Morris 1978, 448. In the words of

even after the fall of the western empire, the Gothic king Theoderic continued to employ the traditional terminology: one inscription describes him as *propagator Romani nominis, domitor gentium*. For Whittaker, who cites this case, this is the 'final unreality'.¹³¹ Unrealistic it certainly is, but there is no reason to suppose that Theoderic (or anyone else) took the idea seriously. A post-imperial people, as the Romans living in Italy at this time might be considered, can on the other hand perhaps be forgiven for appreciating rhetoric which recalled the glories of a bygone age.

The importance of ideology or propaganda must not be underrated. No emperor could afford to ignore his reputation: it was essential to be perceived as a conqueror, as a ruler who had triumphed over foreign foes. Thus in later times, Trajan's reputation stood high because of his victories in Dacia and in the East; by contrast, Nero and Domitian attracted unpopularity, at least in some sections of Roman society, because of their lack of military activity or success.¹³² We must note, however cynical it may be, that what was important was the appearance of success, rather than the reality. Emperors crafted their reputations, employing a wide range of techniques to project the right image - coin emissions, the construction of monuments, the patronage of works of literature. They could thus obscure setbacks and seek to cover up defeats, even if this might not always prove successful. Thus in 218 the emperor Macrinus took the title of Parthicus Maximus and proclaimed *Victoria parthica* on his coins despite having suffered a defeat at Nisibis

Davies 1999, 895, 'By 1999, the idea that "Britannia rules the waves" had become as remote as the idea that anyone but the USA ruled land, sea, air or space.' *Ibid.* 1004 on the singing of 'Rule Britannia' at the Proms. Brunt 1990, 442, gives the parallel of an 'imperialistic ditty' still sung at Conservative party conferences.

¹³¹ Whittaker 1994, 198, citing *CIL* X.6850. Cf. however Amory 1997, 53, who points out that Theoderic's kingdom was still defined as the *res publica Romana*. One might compare the title still claimed by Elizabeth II, *Fidei Defensor*, however implausible and anachronistic it might now seem. In general, triumphal celebrations seem to have increased in the late empire, as Isaac 1993, 107 notes, following McCormick 1986, 78-9.

¹³² See Whittaker 1994, 36, cf. 70 on the unpopularity of Hadrian; also Isaac 1992, 23-6, Mattern 1999, 108-9 and n.161 below. Halfmann 1994, 582-3, notes criticisms of Trajan, however.

in the previous year.¹³³ Following his defeat, Macrinus agreed to a peace with Parthia and made a substantial payment to the Parthians.¹³⁴ In light of these events, can Macrinus be seen as an emperor bent on the expansion of the empire at all costs? Plainly he cannot. Emperors were the masters, not the prisoners, of ideology.¹³⁵ Although he had only acquired the throne in 217, Macrinus was well aware of what was necessary to buttress his position. A victory, even if claimed rather than real, was what was needed; unfortunately for him, it was not enough.

The policies of Hadrian confirm this argument. There is no need to detail the measures he took which, to contemporaries and modern scholars alike, appear clearly defensive.¹³⁶ It is sufficient to note that, in spite of whatever prejudices and preconceptions existed among members of the Roman elite, one emperor at least was able to withdraw armies from operations beyond the frontiers and to curtail such offensive actions. It is true, of course, that the Roman emperor was an extremely busy person, as Fergus Millar has shown.¹³⁷ The resources with which he was equipped to make these decisions were limited, no less so in the case of foreign policy than in other areas. The flow of information was slow; there was, at least in the early empire, no professional apparatus to advise the emperor; the emperor himself, like his advisers, had received a thoroughly traditional education, which tended to offer a somewhat simplistic and hostile attitude to barbarian peoples.¹³⁸ These points are

¹³³ Example cited by Wheeler 2002, 289, along with others. A parallel would be the case of Jovian in 363, portraying his treaty with Shapur as a victory on his coin emissions. See Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 9 and Ehling 1996.

¹³⁴ Wheeler 2002, 289, Millar 1993, 145.

¹³⁵ So MacMullen 1976, ch.2, esp.44, Gruen 1990, 395-9 (on Augustus, emphasising the difference between rhetoric and reality), Mattern 1999, 196-8. *Contra*, Whittaker 1994, 206: 'Emperors believed their own propaganda'; some may indeed have done (see n.164), but not many. At 199, on the other hand, Whittaker views Justinian's declarations on Africa (noted above) as 'a propaganda statement for public consumption.' Quite so.

¹³⁶ See Birley 1974, 15-17, Whittaker 1994, 36 (though cf. 57); Brunt 1990, 472-5.

¹³⁷ See Millar 1977, Millar 1982.

¹³⁸ So Millar 1982. Mattern 1999, ch.1, lays great stress on the out-dated nature of the training received by the emperor and his ministers, so also MacMullen 1976,

all well taken, but we must be wary of circumscribing too narrowly the conceptual framework within which emperors operated. Here the case of Hadrian is relevant, for whatever training and advice he had received, he opted for a defensive policy. Furthermore, some of the bookish ministers singled out by those who wish to play up the amateurishness of Roman decision-making were far from inexperienced policy advisers. Arrian is a good example. While it is true that his works display a marked interest in the distant past, he was also a commander who had seen active military service. The value of the advice of such a man was certainly evident to Hadrian.¹³⁹

With these points in mind, we should turn our attention to Augustus. Debate has simmered for many years as to how to interpret his foreign policy - whether on the one hand he sought to establish secure frontiers for his empire, as Tacitus (*Ann.* I.11) suggests or whether on the other he was determined to subdue as much of the known world as he could and was only prevented from doing so by various setbacks. For some years, the latter view has been in the ascendant, ever since the publication of an influential review of a book by Meyer arguing the contrary.¹⁴⁰ The primary grounds for attributing a more aggressive policy to Augustus are the statements of contemporary poets; the literary sources, such as Dio, who impute a more defensive policy to him, date to a later period, and so, it is argued, do not accurately reflect the attitudes of the time.

ch.3, Whittaker 1994, 69-70, 194-200. A rather more upbeat assessment of the availability of information in Wheeler 1993, 230-3 and see n.80 above; also Gabba 1989, 498-9.

¹³⁹ Mattern 1999, 18, cites the case of Arrian among others as typifying the inexperienced senators who offered advice to emperors. Pliny the Younger is a better example, *ibid.* 20. Themistius, *Or.* 34.9, p.218 well brings out the prominence and experience of Arrian, cf. Sherk 1974, 542-3. Wheeler 1993, 30-1, rightly doubts the usefulness of a distinction between amateurs and professionals in any case. The *mandata* (instructions) issued to provincial governors by emperors also testify to an ability to formulate consistent policies, cf. Potter 1996, esp. 56-60.

¹⁴⁰ Brunt 1963. Cited with approval (e.g.) by Birley 1974, 13-15 (an important article). Whittaker 1994, 35-6, also doubts Tacitus' interpretation of Augustus' policy, seeing it rather as a temporary expedient. Brunt 1990 and Mehl 1994 still argue for an expansionist policy on the part of Augustus; only the realisation that it was beyond their grasp led to a scaling-down of campaigning. Gruen 1990, esp. 395-6, sets more store by Augustus' image as a conqueror; so also Gabba 1989, 500.

However, the pronouncements of the poets are themselves open to question, and it would seem unduly naive to suppose that 'poets cannot have misrepresented the intentions of the regime'.¹⁴¹ One further vital piece of evidence must be taken into account. The *Res Gestae* of Augustus record the many accomplishments of the first emperor. Among them is the boast to have subjected the entire world (*orbis terrarum*) to the rule of the Roman people (*proem.*). The same work insists also on the expansion of the frontiers of the empire and reports how Augustus entrusted the rule of certain regions to kings, even if he could have taken them over directly. Numerous far-off places are mentioned, many unfamiliar to contemporaries, emphasising just how far Roman armies had penetrated under Augustus' administration (ch.26).¹⁴² There is no reason, however, to see in the work a programme

¹⁴¹ Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 398, citing Brunt, quoted by Syme 1991, 386. *Ibid.* 382-6 for a successful rebuttal of the weight attached by too many to the poets' declarations, cf. Gruen 1990, 411-13. Brunt 1990, 443, sees Augustus as sympathising with the poets' ambitions. On Dio see Reinhold and Swan 1990, 162-4. I am grateful to Professor Hartmut Leppin of Frankfurt University for drawing my attention to Becker, 2003, 337-50. It is clear from this article that around the turn of the millenium a serious attempt at creating a province of Germania beyond the Rhine was made, as the excavation of civilian buildings at Lahnau-Waldgirmes have revealed. Although this initiative came to nothing, Becker rightly underlines, 349-50, that taken over the period from 16 B.C. to A.D. 16 the German policy of Augustus and Tiberius can be viewed as a success, in that it had managed to secure the Rhine frontier by removing the German threat.

¹⁴² A point well brought out by Mattern 1999, 164-71, cf. Whittaker 1994, 16-17, 44, Mehl 1994, 445, Brodersen 2003, 119-21. Client kingdoms, which owed allegiance to Rome, were regarded, at least for the purposes of propaganda, as Roman (and thus greatly expanded the scope for praise of the emperor): see Troussset 1993, 27-9, Gruen 1990, 410-11 (the case of Augustus, who could thus regard Britain and Armenia as Roman, cf. Whittaker 1994, 54), Brunt 1990, 434-7.

Josephus, *BJ* II.16.388, describes the whole world (*oikoumene*) as being Roman, yet simultaneously acknowledges that Roman control did not extend across the Euphrates. See Arnaud 1993, 55. The exaggeration is paralleled by Augustus' own, as noted here. The claim to world domination expressed in *orbis noster* becomes well-worn, cf. Chauvot 1998, 295, on its use in the reign of Theodosius I by the panegyricist Pacatus (again in conjunction with references to places outside the Roman empire).

of imperial expansion. A more plausible interpretation is to see in it an attempt to put the best possible gloss on all his undertakings, whether they resulted in conquests or not. Arther Ferrill sums up the point thus:

When Augustus wrote that the empire was bounded by the ocean from Spain to the mouth of the Elbe, he was not stating a fact - he was concealing a defeat. Nor did he believe that the area north of the Danube had in any effective way been conquered by Roman arms, although he made that claim.¹⁴³

Too much attention has been devoted to the literary sources. 'Facts of history bring redress. On brief statement, what the Romans achieved through centuries of warfare and conquest.'¹⁴⁴ It is more profitable, as Syme argued, to focus on the events themselves. In Germany, for instance, Christian Hänger has examined in detail the campaigns conducted in the early imperial period. Several points emerge. First, the sophistication of the operations, particularly in the case of the pincer-movement directed against Maroboduus.¹⁴⁵ Second, the Romans could perceive rivers both as boundaries and as landmarks. From the time of Julius Caesar, the Rhine was perceived as a frontier, even if the Romans reserved the right to cross it when it suited them. The Elbe, on the other hand, was a landmark, a convenient point of reference, rather like the river Araxes in the East.¹⁴⁶ It is referred to as a way of expressing Rome's world domination. There is no evidence to support the idea that it was ever considered as a frontier, however.¹⁴⁷ The Danube frontier,

¹⁴³ Ferrill 1991, 75. Cf. Wheeler 2002, 289, viewing Augustus' portrayal of the Parthian hand-over the Roman standards as an excellent example of 'non-event' portrayed as a great victory; also Campbell 1993, 226-8, Gruen 1990, 413-16. Mehl 1994, 463-4, explains the contrast between propaganda and reality rather on the grounds that the Romans had to revert to a more modest policy following the failure of their imperialist ambitions.

¹⁴⁴ Syme 1991, 377.

¹⁴⁵ Hänger 2001, 191-4, cf. 222-3 (arguing for the use of maps in order to plan such operations). So also Wheeler 1993, 236-7.

¹⁴⁶ On the Araxes, Hänger 2001, 259, cf. Arnaud 1993, 51 and Brodersen 2003, 104.

¹⁴⁷ See Hänger 2001, 236-62, Gruen 1990, 406. The fact that the Rhine was in no sense a cultural frontier (see, e.g., Whittaker 1994, 62, 74-5, 78-9, Mattern 1999, 75-6) is not relevant. Carrié 1995, 46, rightly rejects Whittaker's exaggeration that

already conceived as such in the *Res Gestae* (30.1), is acknowledged equally in an oft-quoted inscription from the reign of Nero, testifying to the energetic activities of a governor of Moesia, Ti. Plautius Silvanus.¹⁴⁸ On the eastern frontier, the Euphrates was undeniably a convenient marker in an otherwise fairly featureless landscape. Not surprisingly, already in the time of Pompey the Parthians sought to persuade the Romans to acknowledge it as a borderline between the two powers; Pompey, however, did not accept.¹⁴⁹ By the time of Augustus, following the defeat of Crassus and the less than successful campaigns of Mark Antony, the Romans were willing to be more accommodating. Augustus had much to lose by embarking upon war with his powerful eastern neighbour; more could be gained, as is made clear in the *Res Gestae*, by diplomacy and the threat of arms.¹⁵⁰ Thus a meeting came to be held in the middle of the Euphrates between his grandson, Gaius, and the young Parthian king Phraates IV. Velleius Paterculus, an eye-witness to the event, describes the scene:

On an island in the Euphrates, with an equal retinue on each side, Gaius had a meeting with the king of the Parthians, a young man of distinguished presence. This

frontiers normally cut across culturally homogeneous zones. Potter 1987 and Hänger 2001, 259-62, see the mention of the Rhine in the *Tabula Siarensis* as an acknowledgement of the Rhine frontier, an argument which Whittaker 1996, 35-6, fails to refute.

¹⁴⁸ *ILS* 986, tr. in Sherk 1988, 104-5, on which see Millar 1982, 7-8, esp. his comment on p.8: 'the assumption implicit in the language of the inscription [is] that the Danube and its banks constituted the frontier of the empire'; also Mattern 1999, 110. The reference to 'Transdanuviani' is significant. Potter 1996, 59, is right to interpret the document as an illustration of the aggressive defence pursued by governors. Whittaker 1994, 43, views the Danube as a 'dividing line', which did not mark the limit of Roman power. This may still, however, be legitimately termed a frontier, albeit one which the Romans felt entitled to cross when it suited them (as Mehl 1994, 446, 452, emphasises). See also above p.126 on the same situation in the fourth century.

¹⁴⁹ See Whittaker 1994, 27, 53-4, Sherwin-White 1984, 222, Winter 1994, 591-4.

¹⁵⁰ See Gruen 1990, 396-7, Campbell 1993, 221-3, Mattern 1999, 106-7. Sherwin-White 1984, 322-41, argues that it was too dangerous for Augustus to embark on a campaign against the Parthians.

spectacle of the Roman army arrayed on one side, the Parthian on the other, while these two eminent leaders not only of the empire they represented but also of mankind thus met in conference - truly a notable and a memorable sight - it was my fortunate lot to see early in my career as a soldier, when I held the rank of tribune. (II.101, tr. F.W. Shipley)

Now proponents of the 'ideological' school of Roman imperialism, and indeed some opponents, refuse to see in the Euphrates an actual frontier between the two powers.¹⁵¹ Coming at these negotiations from the perspective of the late empire, however, we see that such mid-river negotiations are plausibly interpreted as a concession to the Parthians; in effect, the Romans, if only implicitly, were recognising the river as the boundary of their empire. The fact that Velleius puts the two leaders on an even footing tends towards the same interpretation.¹⁵² Subsequent events in Syria confirm this impression: governors, and indeed emperors who issued them with their *mandata*, preferred to avoid crossing the river unless the Parthians had already provoked hostilities.¹⁵³ Modern

¹⁵¹ On the episode, see Gruen 1990, 397-8. Those who do not see it as a frontier: Arnaud 1993, 47 and n.4, Wheeler 2002, 289-90. Those who do: Campbell 1993, 224, Halfmann 1994, 578-9, Dabrowa 1986, 98-9, idem 2002, 276-7, Bennett 2002, 302. Wheeler 1991, 505-6, views the Euphrates as a frontier in Syria and the middle-Euphrates region only.

¹⁵² Whether or not a formal treaty was agreed, as (e.g.) Campbell 1993, 216-20, accepts, or as Wheeler 2002, 289, denies, is immaterial. Brunt 1990, 456-64, plays up Roman aggressive intentions in the East; some scholars (see most recently Retsö 2003) see in Aelius Gallus' expedition to Arabia a misguided attempt to turn the Parthians' southern flank. Wheeler 2002, 287, argues that the Romans never treated the Parthians as an equal, at least not before the third century; Justin, in his epitome of Trogus, on the other hand, refers to the sharing of the world between Romans and Parthians, cf. Arnaud 1993, 51.

¹⁵³ See Potter 1996, 58 on the limits on a governor's power set by the *mandata* received from the emperor (cf. Tac. *Ann.* XI.19-20). For a detailed discussion of the show of force offered by Vitellius in A.D. 36 or 37, which was followed by a meeting between the governor and the Parthian king Artabanus on a bridge over the Euphrates, see Winter 1994, 594-6 (rejecting the accounts of Suetonius and Dio, according to which Vitellius actually crossed the Euphrates). Vitellius' *démarche* should not be viewed as an aggressive act, *contra* Whittaker 1994, 35: see Dabrowa 2002, 275 and Halfmann 1994, 579.

scholars have underlined just how unsatisfactory rivers are as frontiers; they are, after all, easily crossed, and often serve better as channels of communication rather than as barriers. This cannot be denied. Yet the Romans chose to use them as demarcation lines from an early period, e.g. in the case of the Ebro in the late third century B.C. or the Halys in the second.¹⁵⁴ In these cases, it is clear that these lines were a long way from the areas already under Roman control; they may plausibly be thought of as a political claim to the region concerned, as Whittaker argues.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, the examples just cited, as well as others from the fourth century A.D., show that the Romans were equally capable of recognising a river-frontier between themselves and another state.¹⁵⁶

It is time to conclude this section on the high empire. We began by quoting an extract of Dio Cassius on the founder of the Severan dynasty; it is appropriate to end by citing a passage concerning its last member, Alexander Severus. In the winter of 232/3, following an unsuccessful three-pronged attack on the Persians,¹⁵⁷ news came to the emperor of serious problems on the Rhine and Danube frontiers. Herodian describes the situation as follows:

¹⁵⁴ So Whittaker 1994, 18, 61. See however Wheeler 1993, 228-9, Marzolf 1994, esp. 358-60 on the use of rivers as convenient frontier markers (his type B). Mann 1974, 513, accepts that rivers were chosen as boundaries by the Romans for bureaucratic reasons, cf. Lattimore 1962, 470. See also Braund 1996, a useful short contribution on Roman perception of rivers.

¹⁵⁵ Whittaker 1994, 26-7.

¹⁵⁶ Note the treaty of 298, explicitly designating the Tigris as a frontier. Whittaker 1994, 37, while discussing the passages of Aelius Aristides and Appian noted above, sees an inconsistency in their apparently defensive outlook, since the former claims that 'you recognise no fixed boundaries..' (Ael. Arist. *Or.*24.99). But his translation may be improved: one might better render the Greek as 'You do not rule over frontiers laid down (*sc.* by others), nor does another (power) ordain the point up to which you may hold sway'. This does not prevent the Romans from fixing their own frontiers, however. Cf. Lattimore 1962, 477, according to whom the Chinese built the Great Wall 'to set a limit to their own expansion'.

¹⁵⁷ In itself a testament to Roman strategic ability, even if the manoeuvre proved somewhat unsuccessful. Details in Herodian, VI.5-6, tr. in Dodgeon and Lieu 1991, 23-8.

Alexander and his advisers who accompanied him were by this time even concerned about Italy, rating the German menace as very different from the Persians. The inhabitants of the eastern territories, separated as they are by a wide stretch of land and sea, hardly hear about Italy. But the Illyrian provinces are a narrow stretch of land that do not occupy much of Roman territory. This makes the Germans practically adjacent neighbours of the Italians. Reluctantly and sadly (through sheer necessity) Alexander issued the proclamation of an expedition. (Herodian, VI.7.4-5, tr. C.R. Whittaker)

Alexander accordingly set about making preparations for a campaign on the Rhine, where he arrived in 234. This passage is quoted by Fergus Millar as proof of the increasing importance of the emperor in leading campaigns in the third century.¹⁵⁸ But it is significant in other regards too. It gives clear evidence of strategic planning on the part of Alexander and his entourage, weighing up the needs of the eastern and European frontiers. Geographical factors are involved: Italy is directly threatened. Furthermore, there can be no doubt that Severus Alexander is far from pursuing the idea of a boundless empire. As it turned out, it proved to be beyond his capabilities to defend the frontiers he inherited. Other emperors in the third century did not even hesitate to withdraw from provinces hitherto under Roman control, notably in Dacia.¹⁵⁹ In light of the examples we have cited, it becomes difficult to perceive a consistent ideology of expansion on the part of the Romans. The notion of a policy of defensive imperialism being practised in the early empire is not so far-fetched. Tim Cornell, in an important analysis of the reasons for the halting of Roman expansion, even traces the origins of such an attitude back to the late republic; in his view, the numerous campaigns of Augustus represent a break with the general trend, necessitated partly by the need for the new ruler to solidify his position by displaying his

¹⁵⁸ Millar 1982, 13, cf. Mattern 1999, 98-9.

¹⁵⁹ See Whittaker 1994, 183; also Goldsworthy, forthcoming, 'Grand Strategy'. As he notes, *ibid.* 205, the Romans soon claimed to have recovered the province. Bogdan Cataniciu, 2002, 725-7, notes that there is no immediate change visible (archaeologically) following the departure of the Roman troops. In principle, she argues, the Romans never abandoned their claim to the territory; they simply withdrew their forces. Justinian clearly applied this reasoning in the case of Britain and Turris, cf. n.32 above.

military ability.¹⁶⁰ This is not to deny, of course, the ideology of conquest and empire. From every period of Roman history, as we have seen, poets, historians and others emphasised Rome's right to rule and the glories of military conquest. In the second century A.D., on the other hand, we certainly begin to find signs of a more defensive attitude in sources such as Appian and Aelius Aristides. It is against this background, no doubt, that Septimius Severus felt compelled to make his justification of the conquest of Mesopotamia.¹⁶¹

Our conclusions may be summed up as follows. There is ample evidence, both from the high empire and late antiquity, of Roman strategic ability. Sophisticated operations, involving the co-ordination of several armies, were mounted on various occasions. It is highly probable that maps were used to facilitate such campaigns. One cannot, on the other hand, assume that the Romans had no access to maps and then proceed to draw conclusions about Roman strategic capabilities. We have also sought to portray Roman policy as fundamentally defensive in nature. Emperors consistently strove to maintain and protect the empire they had inherited; some believed that the best way to protect it was to pre-empt enemy attacks by striking first, and in some cases even to extend the frontiers of the empire. All believed that they had the right to cross the frontier into barbarian soil and to install forts there if they wished. This is quite different, however, from denying the existence of frontiers. Indeed, the evidence points rather towards a willingness to mark out territory. The ideology of conquest should not be ignored. Certainly, it was important in influencing how emperors portrayed their policies, so that they played up their military successes; sometimes, it might even encourage emperors to prove their credentials through the accomplishing of some military exploit (e.g. in the case of Claudius).¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Cornell 1993, 157-64. Cf. Birley 1974, 14, noting opposition to conquests under the republic (cf. Badian 1968, ch.3). It is worth noting in this context that (according to Valerius Maximus, IV.1.10) the prayer of the censor at the *suovetaurilia* was modified in 142 B.C.: whereas hitherto they had prayed that the gods that 'the Roman people's estate may grow more prosperous and greater', they henceforth prayed that the gods would keep their possessions 'safe in perpetuity'. See Badian 1968, 4, 94 n.7, Birley, *ibid.* and Whittaker 1994, 21-3.

¹⁶¹ See n.124 above for references. Potter 1996, 60, on Severus.

¹⁶² On Claudius, see Whittaker 1994, 44 and Hanson 2002, 27. On Augustus, Gruen 1990, 401, Brunt 1990, 446. On internal factors motivating campaigns, see

But it is a mistake to suppose that emperors inevitably believed in this ideology: if Hadrian was capable of adopting more defensive policies, it follows that any other emperor could come to similar conclusions.¹⁶³ We must concede, of course, that some emperors do appear to have believed in the rhetoric which surrounded them - Nero is one example, but Julian and Justin II are also obvious cases.¹⁶⁴ Needless to say, they are not widely regarded as the most successful emperors. Most, however, were realists, well aware of the limits of their power. Any ambitious campaign they undertook in person beyond the frontiers carried with it great risk: defeat would almost certainly bring death or provoke a rebellion. Such a campaign entrusted to another general offered the possibility that he might exploit his command to challenge the emperor for the throne.¹⁶⁵ No wonder, therefore, that many emperors preferred to exploit to the full any minor successes that were won under their rule whilst avoiding any major engagements beyond the frontiers.

* * *

We have concentrated our arguments for the most part on the period of late antiquity. From the evidence assembled, it seems highly probable that in this period at least the Roman government operated a policy of defensive imperialism. Conscious of being threatened on many sides, successive emperors sought merely to maintain control of the territories they had inherited from their predecessors; a few more ambitiously tried

Millar 1982, 13, Potter 1996, 60. Cf. Mattern 1999, 108-9, on criticisms of emperors perceived to be unwarlike. Wheeler 1993, 222, rightly points out that motives like the search for glory do not exclude more rational considerations.

¹⁶³ Mattern 1999, 33, 208-9, 222 on the other hand argues that the rhetoric (i.e. the ideology) is the reality, i.e. that the Romans could not conceive of a defensive policy.

¹⁶⁴ On Nero, Kolendo 1982. See p.116 above on Justin II. Whittaker 1994, 203-4, regards Julian's Persian invasion as reflecting the 'prevailing mentality'. We have already seen, however, that it was not without provocation (n.117 above). Furthermore, the campaign did attract criticism, cf. Matthews 1989, 134-5.

¹⁶⁵ See Brunt 1990b, 470-1, noting how few emperors had military experience before ascending the throne; Mattern 1999, 200-1, on emperors restraining the campaigns of subordinates, cf. Goldsworthy, forthcoming, 'Grand Strategy'.

to recover some which they had lost. It follows from this that there was both an acknowledgement of frontiers of the empire and a willingness to recognise them. The cession of territories to the Persians in 363 by Jovian nicely illustrates the point: frontiers were determined by the agreement and, much to the dismay of many contemporaries, certain areas handed over to Persian control. Significantly, however, no serious attempt was ever made to reclaim the territory ceded to the Persians.¹⁶⁶ The vocal criticism of Jovian's concessions reminds us that the rhetoric of empire was as strong as ever in the period, whatever the limits of imperial power. For this reason, the next emperor to come into conflict with the Persians, the singularly unmartial Theodosius II, exploited the somewhat limited Roman successes in the war to the full.¹⁶⁷ No changes were made to the frontier at the conclusion of the war, however. Furthermore, as the frontiers of the empire stabilised over time, emperors became more inclined to protect them by fixed defensive installations - what Napoli calls linear defences. In some cases this meant building or strengthening major fortresses close to the frontiers, as at Dara, while in others it involved an actual wall, as in the case of the Thracian Chersonese or the Long Walls defending the approaches to Constantinople from the west.¹⁶⁸ The massive Theodosian walls of Constantinople, combined with the further walls put up under Anastasius and the other defences erected (e.g.) at the Isthmus of Corinth are hardly the mark of an empire bent on expansion and conquest. Rather, they are the obvious signs of a power on the defensive, exploiting to the full its expertise in fort-building and the natural defences of its frontiers. Gibbon's stern judgement is appropriate:

¹⁶⁶ See Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 1-9 on the hand-over, esp. 1-4 for sources which decry the surrender of Nisibis and its surrounding territories. Cf. above n.133 on Jovian's attempts to portray the treaty as a success. I do not take the subsequent claim, mentioned in some sources, that the city was only handed over for 120 years seriously: rather, it was a somewhat dubious argument offered by the Roman government to rebuff Persian requests for subsidies in the 480s. See Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 248 n.22. Note also Themistius' willingness to accept the loss of territories, above n.76.

¹⁶⁷ See Holum 1977 and Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 37-42.

¹⁶⁸ See Napoli 1993, 71-2 on these linear defences; Greatrex 1995 on the dating of the defences of the Thracian Chersonese. On the Long Walls see Crow 1995.

The fortifications of Europe and Asia were multiplied by Justinian; but the repetition of those timid and fruitless precautions exposes to a philosophic eye the debility of the empire.¹⁶⁹

Our conclusions about Roman cartography and the use of maps are less definite. What is certain, however, is the ability of emperors, whether or not they used maps, to negotiate treaties about frontiers and to make strategic decisions. In some ways, therefore, the debate about maps is unimportant. The evidence we have put forward does at any rate demonstrate that it is wrong to infer the absence of maps from supposed Roman military incompetence: Roman generals were rarely defeated because of a lack of knowledge of their surroundings.¹⁷⁰ On the contrary, the conduct of campaigns tends to point rather towards a use of maps in planning operations. As for frontiers and expansionism under the high empire, we have argued that it is possible to detect a defensive outlook from an early stage. Frontiers did exist and were accepted right from the reign of Augustus. To be sure, there were many who believed that Roman power should continue to expand indefinitely; but in practice, Roman claims to a boundless empire amounted to little more than claiming the right to intervene wherever they wanted - on either side of the frontier. In no way does this call into question the existence of a clear political frontier itself.

¹⁶⁹ Gibbon 1909, 266, echoing Montesquieu 1968, 163. Cf. Crow 1995, 120-1.

¹⁷⁰ So Syme 1991, 378-80. Crassus' choice of the open plains in his attack on Parthia probably represents an obvious exception to this argument (though this is denied by Arnaud 1991, 754).

Abbreviations

Agath.	Agathias, <i>historiae</i> , ed. R. Keydell, CFHB
Amm.	Ammianus Marcellinus, <i>res gestae</i> , ed. J. C. Rolfe, LCL
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Studies of Oriental Research</i>
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , 3rd edn., ed. F. Halkin, 3 vols. (Brussels)
BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
BSAA	<i>Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Alexandrie</i>
CE	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i>
CIJ	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum</i>
CIS	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i>
CJ	<i>Codex Justinianus</i> , ed. P. Krueger, eleventh edition. (Berlin 1954)
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
CShB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
<i>Dura Report</i>	<i>The Excavations at Dura-Europos Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters: Preliminary Report of the [First-Ninth] Season of Work</i> (New Haven)
Eus., <i>h. e.</i> ,	Eusebius, <i>historia ecclesiastica</i> , ed. E. Schwartz, GCS
—, <i>v. Const.</i>	Idem, <i>vita Constantini</i> , ed. F. Winkelman, GCS
FHG	<i>Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum</i> , ed. C. Müller, 5 vols. (Paris)
FHN	<i>Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the eighth century BC and the sixth century BC</i> , edd. T. Eide, T. Hägg, R. Holton Pierce and L. Török (Bergen)
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
IGLS	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie</i>
<i>IJudO</i> iii	<i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i> vol.3, <i>Syria and Cyprus</i> eds. D. Noy, D. & and H. Bloedhorn (Tübingen)
JARCE	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>

JIWE	<i>Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe</i> , 3 vols., ed. D. Noy (Cambridge)
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library (London and Camb. MA)
MDAIK	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i>
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome</i>
Men. Prot.	Menander Protector, <i>Historiae</i> , ed. R. C. Blockley, <i>The History of Menander the Guardsman</i> (Liverpool, 1985).
PBA	<i>Papers of the British Academy</i>
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Graeco-Latina</i>
Philost.	Philostorgius, <i>historia ecclesiastica</i> , ed. J. Bidez and revised by J. Winklemann, GCS
Proc.	Procopius, <i>Opera</i> , ed. H.B. Dewing, LCL
SB	<i>Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten</i>
SEG	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SHA	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i> , ed. D. Magie
SKZ	(Inscription of Shapur at the Kaaba of Zoroastre), "Res Gestae Divi Saporis", ed. P. Huyse, <i>Die dreisprachige Inschrift Sabuhrs I. an der Ka'ba-i Zardust (SKZ)</i> , Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum 3/i, 2 vols. (London,)
Soc.	Socrates, <i>historia ecclesiastica</i> , ed. G.C. Hansen, GCS
Soz.	Sozomenus, <i>historia ecclesiastica</i> , ed. J. Bidez and revised by G.C. Hansen, GCS
Theoph. Sim.	Theophylactus Simocates, <i>historiae</i> , ed. C. de Boor and revised by P. Wirth (Leipzig, 1972)
V. Alex. Akoim.	<i>Vita Alexandri Akoimetae</i> , ed. E. de Stoop, <i>Patrologia Orientalis</i> 9 (1911) p. 658ff
Zon.	Zonaras, <i>Annales</i> , edd. M. Pinder <i>et al.</i> , CSHB
Zos.	Zosimus, <i>Historia Nova</i> , ed. L. Mendelssohn
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

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